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An Alternative Politics: Texas Baptist Leaders and the Rise of the Christian Right, 1960-1985

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines one of the most counter-intuitive southern responses to the rise of the Christian Right. Texas Baptists made up the largest state association of Southern Baptists in the country. They were theologically conservative, uniformly uncomfortable with abortion, and strident in their condemnation of homosexuality. Yet they not only rejected an alliance with the Christian Right and the Republican Party, but they did so emphatically. They ultimately offered a more robust critique of the Christian Right than even many of their secular counterparts. While their activities might seem surprising to contemporary readers, they were part of a long and proud Baptist tradition of supporting the separation of church and state. On issues like organized school prayer, government regulation of abortion, and private school vouchers, they were disturbed by the blurring of lines between church and state that characterized the Christian Right as it emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Texas Baptists were also uncomfortable with the backlash against integration and sought to promote racial justice in any way they could. While many southerners adopted a politics of cultural resentment, Texas Baptists often worked for racial

justice and promoted interracial cooperation. They also fought the move towards economic conservatism in the South. From their campaigns to raise the welfare cap in Texas to their promotion of Lyndon Johnson's Community Action Programs, Texas Baptists defended government activism to alleviate poverty. They embodied a very different economic ideology than that of the ultra-conservative southerners who have dominated the scholarship of southern politics after 1960. On all of these issues, the experience of Texas Baptists challenges prevailing ideas about southern political change. Their story is one that undermines the notion of a unified evangelical reaction to the racial, economic, and political changes that swept the South (and the nation) after 1960. It should give pause to those who have assumed that the alliance between Southern Baptists and the Christian Right was inevitable or unavoidable and force us to reconsider the complexity of southern evangelicalism.

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When I started work on this dissertation, I had no idea how much help I would need along the way. From critical readings to archival assistance to funding for travel and study, I have been fortunate to rely on a network of scholarly support that made this work possible. It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge those who have influenced my thinking and provided assistance along the way. I am truly appreciative of their help.

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"Philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it." These scholars prove every day that we are capable of doing both, and I am humbled to call them mentors and friends.

I could not have completed this dissertation without the generous contributions of several institutions. The Baylor University Institute for Oral History awarded me their annual Research Fellowship, which allowed me to spend many wonderful hours in their archives. Elinor Maze, in particular, took a special interest in this project, and I am thankful for her friendship and guidance. The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives selected me for the Lynn E. May grant, which provided much-needed travel funds to study in Nashville in their library. I am grateful to Rice University for providing generous financial assistance through the Lodessa Stockbridge Vaughan fellowship. I am also indebted to the Rice University History Department, which consistently came through with funding for conferences, research, and travel, all of which made this final product possible. Paula Platt, Rachel Zepeda, and Lisa Tate guided me through the various requirements for fulfilling my degree, and I am thankful for their help and hard work.

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memories are with my family, often at Razorback-related events. So the most fitting thing I could say to them would be the very first words I remember hearing: GO HOGS GO!

Finally, I want to acknowledge my husband, Shaun McDade Nelson. He has contributed more to my life and to this project than any other person. Anyone who has ever written a dissertation knows the sacrifices that it requires from our spouses, and Shaun has endured many months of sacrifices to allow me to complete this work. I am so grateful. I defended this dissertation exactly one week before our wedding, and it was fitting that these two events took place so close together. One was the culmination of an educational journey, the other a culmination of a personal journey. As much as I have enjoyed pursuing my academic goals, my greatest happiness has come from the journey Shaun and I decided to take together. From our first meeting at a political fundraiser right through our wedding last Friday, we have shared more love and laughter in these past two years than some people receive in a lifetime. Every day, I am amazed by his excitement for life, his commitment to human rights and justice, and his dedication to his family, his friends, and his community. We are both beneficiaries of the struggle for equality that began long before we met each other. My hope is that we will live up to the standards set by those who have gone before us in leaving this country and this world better than we found it. I am humbled and thrilled to be able to dedicate this dissertation to my true love, my partner in life, my husband, Shaun McDade Nelson.

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Introduction

Texas Baptists: The Untold Story of Southern Evangelical Politics

On the eve of the 2004 presidential election, news coverage focused on the importance of evangelical Christians to the electoral chances of the Republican candidate, George W. Bush. One Southern Baptist pastor summed up the feelings of many conservative Christians about the election: "I see it as a spiritual divide between true believers and seculars. I think we as a nation are more divided than we were before the Civil War . . . Those who pray a lot tend to vote Republican; those who don't tend to vote Democrat."[1] One of the most basic facts in recent American political campaigns has been the strong Southern Baptist support for Republican candidates. The nation's largest Protestant denomination was heavily Democratic throughout much of the twentieth century, but a shift toward the GOP began in the late 1970s and grew stronger during the next two decades. During the 1980 presidential election, Southern Baptist pastors favored the Republican candidate over the Democrat by a margin of 56 to 42 percent, which represented stronger Democratic support than the national vote. In 1996, Southern Baptist ministers preferred the Republican candidate by

[1]David D. Kirkpatrick, "Battle Cry of Faithful Pits Believers Against Unbelievers," *The New York Times*, Final Edition, 31 October 2004, Section A, 24. For other examples of such coverage, see Robert D. McFadden, "On the Final Sunday, Sermons Pulse with the Power of Spiritual Suggestion," *The New York Times*, 1 November 2004, Section A, 22; Anne Saker, "Moral Values Propelled Bush; Views on Abortion, Marriage Echoed with White Evangelicals," *The News and Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina)*, Final Edition, 7 November 2004, Section A, 1; "Focus on Moral Values Tipped Vote for Bush," *The Washington Times*, 4 November 2004, Section A, 1.

a margin of 80 percent to 14 percent in an election easily won by the Democrat.[2] The alliance between the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and the Republican Party is such an integral aspect of contemporary politics that observers might be forgiven for not knowing that it is a relatively recent political development.

The increasing affinity of Southern Baptists for the Republican Party since 1980 is part of a larger historical trend: the rise of the Christian Right as a force in American politics.[3] A recent proliferation of scholarly work on the origins of the movement has deepened our understanding of it. Most of these works have examined its religious and political impulses, attempting to explain how the movement came into existence and what its goals are for the United States. These works have demonstrated that the political involvement of religious conservatives was the result of deeply held religious beliefs about controversial social issues. Without question, the most important of these issues was abortion, which religious conservatives stridently opposed. Opposition to gay rights, support for organized prayer in public schools, and concern about sex education also defined their agenda. Southern Baptists have been a crucial component of the Christian Right from its earliest days. Several books have addressed the

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[2]James L. Guth, "Southern Baptist Clergy, the Christian Right, and Political Activism in the South," in Glenn Feldman, ed., *Politics and Religion in the White South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 192.

[3]The term "Christian Right," while generally acceptable as a term for religious conservative voters, remains somewhat controversial. Scholars have used such terms as "Religious Right," "religious conservatives," and "Christian Right" to refer to a group of voters motivated primarily by their religious beliefs and concerned with social issues. The group includes orthodox Roman Catholics, Protestant evangelicals, and conservative members of mainline denominations. Despite such theological diversity, scholars have found it beneficial to address the group as a unified voting bloc when they acted in unison to support socially conservative causes.

importance of Southern Baptists to the growing power of religious conservatives.[4] While this work on Southern Baptists and the Christian Right has been helpful in explaining why the denomination's national leadership made easy alliance with religious conservatives and the Republican Party, it has been neglectful in one important respect: it has provided no serious examination of conservative Southern Baptists who did not find a political home in the Christian Right or the Republican Party.

One of the most intriguing and surprising developments in Southern Baptist life during the late 1970s and early 1980s was the refusal of Texas Baptist leaders to follow the national denomination into alliance with the Christian Right. Despite their state's reputation for social conservatism and the drift towards Republicanism in Texas politics, leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) deliberately resisted their denomination's move towards conservative activism and alignment with the Republican Party. Citing the traditional Baptist support for the separation of church and state, these conservative Baptists argued against the notion that Southern Baptists had a duty to support the Christian Right or the Republican Party. While they shared the theological conservatism of their fellow Southern Baptists, they steadfastly opposed their denomination's move to embrace political conservatism. In doing so, they charted a relatively unique course for a state Baptist convention,

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[4]For examples of this work, see Barry G. Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptists Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); and Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

distinguishing themselves from most of their southern counterparts.[5]

The scholarship on Southern Baptists and the Republican Party has focused mostly on explaining the relative ease with which Southern Baptists allied with the Christian Right. The experience of Texas Baptists in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s mostly falls outside the reach of this current work. Rather than joining forces with the emerging movement of religious conservatives, BGCT leaders opposed such an alliance. The reason was clearly not a lack of theological conservatism. Their writings during these years indicate a theology that was just as conservative as their counterparts in other states. Even on hot-button social issues like abortion and gay rights, they had much in common with the Religious Right. A disdain for abortion and a belief in the sinfulness of homosexuality characterized their writings during these years.

But despite their pronounced social conservatism, the largest state Baptist convention in the country followed a much different course than did the national SBC by refusing to join Christian Right leaders in endorsing the Republican Party. Texas Baptists embraced their historic support for the separation of church and state, even as many southern evangelicals turned away from it. They took unconventional positions on issues like school prayer, government funding of

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[5]Although very little work has been done to examine the responses of state Baptist conventions to changes in American politics, it is clear that most of them moved to embrace the political emphases of the Christian Right. A notable exception was Virginia, where state leaders followed a similar path as their allies in Texas. Historian Bill Leonard notes that only Virginia and Texas "made significant adjustments in their organizations that pointed them toward the moderate position in denominational politics." In both cases, this shift resulted in more conservative Baptists separating to form a rival state convention. No work has examined the experience of Virginia Baptists with the Christian Right, but their leaders joined Texas in opposing the rightward drift of the convention. See Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 126-127. See also Leonard's *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1990).

private schools, abortion rights for women, and a host of other contentious topics. They embraced a broad-based view of government's role in alleviating poverty, fighting the tide of economic conservatism that swept the South during the 1960s and 1970s. They pursued a course of racial moderation, even as most other southern whites embraced the politics of cultural resentment. Finally, Texas Baptists fought against the influence of fundamentalists in their own denomination, even once they realized that they would lose that battle.[6] On all of these issues, Texas Baptists fought against the shift towards Christian Right activism, economic conservatism, and racial strife that dominated the South during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. The current scholarship on southern politics after 1960 implies that white evangelicals' shift to political conservatism was the inevitable result of their orthodox theology and conservative social moorings. But the story of Texas Baptists indicates that white evangelicals experienced these changes in much more complicated ways than historians have previously assumed.

American Fundamentalism: Prelude to the Christian Right

The experience of Texas Baptists is so counterintuitive to our common perceptions of southern religion that any study of them should begin by

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[6]The term "fundamentalist" can be contentious and many Southern Baptist conservatives deplore use of the term to describe themselves. In this article, I have followed Nancy Ammerman's lead in using the term in "its historic sense, not with any pejorative intent. During the earlier part of the twentieth century, the term was coined by groups that chose to fight to defend their traditional understanding of the Bible against the onslaughts of liberalism and the social gospel . . . They intentionally organized against a real threat to what they believed. The threat and the organization are what distinguish fundamentalists from ordinary believers or traditionalists." Ammerman also points out that using the term "fundamentalists" helps distinguish between various types of conservatives. Even the "moderates" were conservative in their theology. Rather than call those to the right of moderates "ultra-conservatives," Ammerman chose to use the term "fundamentalists." For a complete description of her use of these terms, see *Baptist Battles*, 16-17.

summarizing what the current scholarship has taught us about the Christian Right. To begin with, the question of when a cohesive movement actually organized has been a subject of some confusion among scholars. But William Martin sums up the general consensus: The Christian Right mostly organized during "the period from 1960 forward, but the New Christian Right, as the movement is also known, is the lineal descendant of an older Christian Right whose roots run back to the early years of the twentieth century."[7] Certainly, Christian Right activists owed something to the fundamentalist movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Those fundamentalists who resisted the dual onslaught of Darwinism and higher criticism of the Bible paved the way for a new kind of hyper-organized evangelical politics; Christian Right activists of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s built on their work.[8] To fully understand the modern Christian Right, historians must recognize that the movement did not simply appear out of nowhere in the 1970s. Rather, organized conservative Christians built upon a longer tradition of evangelical political activism that historians are only beginning to fully comprehend.

During the nineteenth century, evangelicalism[9] had been the dominant form of American religion, influencing believers on both sides of various

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[7]William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 1.

[8]For more on fundamentalist politics in the early twentieth century, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[9]Evangelicalism is another term that stirs controversy; for the purposes of this work, I rely on Marsden's classic definition of evangelicals as "people professing complete confidence in in the Bible and preoccupied with the message of God's salvation of sinners through the death of Jesus Christ (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3). Although fundamentalists distinguished themselves within evangelicalism for their narrow, literal interpretation of the Bible, all evangelicals held to the Bible as the ultimate guide for living, the inspiration for political and social viewpoints, and the authoritative text on virtually all matters of debate.

controversies. As historian Richard Carwardine has demonstrated, most discussions of social or political issues in the nineteenth century took place in a context of evangelical dominance of the popular culture. This was especially true of the greatest controversy of the time: the debate over slavery. Although evangelicals came to vastly different conclusions about the proper Christian response to that issue, the influence of evangelical religion on the debate was undeniable.[10]

By 1920, the evangelical consensus that had dominated American politics and culture was unraveling. Darwin's theory of evolution had gained respectability among a majority of scientists, most college campuses were filled with professors offering historical, scientific, and geographical criticisms of the Bible, and popular culture was sliding towards secularism. In response to these changes, a movement of fundamentalist Christians became active in fighting to ensure that various Protestant denominations rejected modernism, the attempt to integrate modern knowledge with traditional Christian beliefs and adapt Protestant faith to the times. These fundamentalists mostly failed to gain control of mainline denominations, but they established a pattern of political resistance that expanded beyond their local churches and into the broader political sphere.[11] Clearly, the most famous example of this impulse was the Scopes Trial, which came to symbolize fundamentalist resistance to liberalism and the national drift towards secularism. The popular impression of the trial was that William

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[10]Richard Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993), 30-33.
[11]For more information on the complex fundamentalist response to modernism, see Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

Jennings Bryan and his fundamentalist allies looked foolish and that organized fundamentalist politics was waning in its influence. As Marsden put it, "William Jennings Bryan's ill-fated attempt in the summer of 1925 to slay single-handedly the prophets of Bail brought instead an outpouring of derision. Very quickly . . . the strength of the movement in the centers of national life waned precipitously."[12]

Revivalism and the Resurgence of American Evangelicals

By 1925 most observers believed the movement of organized conservative Christians had run its course. While fundamentalist ideas would continue to influence pockets of believers, particularly in southern and rural areas, most academics, media commentators, and theologians believed that the movement would cease to exert much influence on the national consciousness. In 1925, the editors of the *Christian Century*, a leading light for religious liberals, summed up the conventional wisdom: "Anybody should be able to see that the whole fundamentalist movement was hollow and artificial and wholly lacking in qualities of constructive achievement or survival."[13] Rarely have pundits been so wrong as in this type of prediction about American fundamentalists. Religious historian Joel Carpenter has noted that even while fundamentalists left the national scene during the 1930s and 1940s, they built up a sophisticated infrastructure that would help them stage a comeback in the 1950s and beyond.[14] In his view, the separatist impulse that led fundamentalists to abandon Scopes-

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[12]Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 184-85.
[13]Quoted in Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.
[14]For more on evangelicalism and fundamentalism during these years, see Carpenter, *Revive us Again*. Also, see Mardsen, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

like attempts to alter the public discourse ultimately gave way to their evangelical heritage. In other words, they became convinced of the need to reenter public debates not just to push a particular agenda, but to save the country from its movement towards secularism.

No figure epitomized the evangelical return to public life more than revivalist preacher Billy Graham. He first entered the national scene in 1949 when he led a series of Youth for Christ revivals in Los Angeles. The events drew thousands of attendees and widespread media attention; Graham became an overnight celebrity. His message could scarcely have been better suited for the times. He peppered his speeches with nationalistic appeals and staunch, anti-communist rhetoric. He received a great deal of attention from national political leaders and often commented on issues of public interest. While he adamantly refused to endorse presidential candidates, his views were usually no secret to his supporters.[15] During the 1960 presidential race, Graham made no official endorsement, but privately gave counsel to his old friend and anti-communist ally, Richard Nixon, who was running against Democrat (and Roman Catholic) John F. Kennedy. As scores of Protestant ministers spoke out against the notion of a Catholic president, Graham did nothing to counteract the anti-Catholic fervor. In one letter to Nixon, he encouraged his friend to "concentrate on solidifying the Protestant vote" by choosing as his running mate someone who was an unabashed evangelical. Graham believed that if Nixon reached out to

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[15] William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 45-46. Martin also covers Billy Graham's role in the 1960 election, the Kennedy administration, and the Johnson administration in William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1991).

evangelicals, he could "present a picture of America that would put much of the South and border states in the Republican column and bring about a dedicated Protestant vote to counteract the Catholic vote."[16]

Graham's message to Nixon was an early indication that conservative Christians recognized the impact they could have on the political process. Although Graham never bonded with the Catholic Kennedy, he forged a relationship with Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon Johnson. Following Kennedy's assassination, Graham offered his counsel to Johnson, which the new president readily accepted. The relationship was mutually beneficial. Johnson was happy to have the friendship of the country's most beloved evangelist, knowing that many of Graham's supporters would conclude that he supported Johnson's politics. For his part, Graham was happy to have access to the White House and the ear of the president. Significantly, Graham defended Johnson's tragic prosecution of the Vietnam War, saying it was an important part of the larger effort to defeat communism. When Johnson decided not to seek reelection in 1968, he spared Graham the difficult task of choosing between himself and Nixon, who Graham encouraged to seek the Republican nomination. During the election, Graham was anything but neutral, despite his refusal to issue a formal endorsement. At a September crusade, he offered Nixon a seat of honor in the VIP section, where photographers easily found him. Graham also sat in the audience at one of Nixon's question and answer sessions. After making repeated references to Nixon's strong sense of morality, Graham finally acknowledged just before the election that he had cast an absentee ballot for Nixon. The Nixon

[16]Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 46-48.

campaign used this proclamation to gain the support of undecided Protestants who admired Graham.[17]

There is no doubt that Graham was more careful in his political dealings than leaders of the Christian Right, and his outlook was always more balanced (if still very conservative). But his willingness to be a serious political player provided an important bridge between the fundamentalist activism of the early twentieth century and the Christian Right activism of the late twentieth century. His decision to blend conservative theology and evangelism with a nationalistic, anti-communist message demonstrated for many evangelicals that good Christians could take stands on issues of public policy. His friendships with Presidents Johnson and Kennedy provided access to power that previous evangelicals had never known. Although Graham never fully embraced the Christian Right as it organized in the 1970s and 1980s, his career demonstrated the impact conservative Christians could have on the political process if they expanded their activities beyond religious entreaties to political ones.

The Rise of the Christian Right

Ultimately, Billy Graham's mild-mannered style of politics gave way to a more partisan, confrontational style of evangelical activism. Although the Christian Right would eventually become one of the Republican Party's most important voting blocs, it was a Democratic candidate who first galvanized Protestant voters to unite behind a modern presidential campaign. Born and raised in conservative Southern Baptist churches, Jimmy Carter's evangelical roots could not be denied. During his run for the presidency, he made no secret

[17]Ibid, 95-97.

of his evangelical beliefs and often used the phrase "born again" to describe himself. Despite frequent references to his Protestant faith, he also avoided references that could be construed as offensive to other religious traditions, particularly Catholicism and Judaism. Significantly, he retreated from taking strong stances on controversial issues like abortion rights and the rights of gays and lesbians. By the time of his 1976 presidential campaign, a vocal anti-abortion lobby was already active, and opposition to gay rights was increasingly a galvanizing issue for evangelicals. Despite the potential for political gain, Carter refused to emphasize either of these issues, choosing instead to center his message on honest government and a host of economic proposals. Carter did not make significant contact with evangelical leaders, as Ronald Reagan would later do, nor did he target evangelicals through television or radio campaigns. He worried that doing so would offend other groups and bring down his coalition, which also included most of the country's liberals.[18] According to Carter's campaign manager, "Our appeal to them (evangelicals) in 1976 was not done as formally as it was in '80 and '84 by Reagan and the Republicans. The appeal was because of Carter's own religion, because he's a born again Christian and his experience as an evangelical. There was no particular message."[19]

Although he refused to make opposition to abortion or gay rights a central part of his campaign, Carter's identification with the evangelical tradition was enough to earn him strong support from voters who shared his faith. A majority of white evangelicals supported Carter for president over incumbent Gerald Ford. At

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[18]Bruce Nesmith, *The New Republican Coalition: The Reagan Campaigns and White Evangelicals* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 59-61.
[19]Ibid., 60.

the time, the group consisted of over 45 million Americans, and their support was crucial to Carter's narrow victory.[20] For that support, many evangelicals expected that Carter would grant them access to the White House and use his office to expand their influence. For many of them, their expectations for Carter included serious attention to controversial social issues.[21]

Because of the attention Carter's campaign brought to evangelicals, *Newsweek* magazine proclaimed 1976 "the year of the evangelical."[22] Given the influence of evangelicals on the presidential race, that description was certainly accurate; but white evangelicals had not yet aligned with one particular political party. They voted Republican in 1968 and 1972, but their voting patterns only mirrored the national trend. Their switch back to the Democratic column in 1976 signified the instability of white evangelical voting patterns and the lack of a cohesive movement. When Carter began his presidency, few people had even heard of Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell, the two men who would become leaders of the Christian Right in the 1980s. Falwell was a prominent Baptist minister who had not yet jumped into full-fledged political work, and Robertson was known mostly for his charismatic bent and his religious broadcasting.[23] Not only that, but neither figure had fully aligned himself with the Republican Party. In fact, Robertson made numerous statements during the 1976 campaign in support of his fellow evangelical, Jimmy Carter. He later broke with Carter over social

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[20]Ibid., 59-61.
[21]Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133-34.
[22]James Murray Oldfield, *The Right and the Righteous: The Christian Right Confronts the Republican Party* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 106.
[23]For more on Jerry Falwell, see Martin, *With God on Our Side*; for more on Pat Robertson, see Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997).

issues and subsequently claimed to have cast a last-minute vote for Ford due to his doubts about Carter.[24] We may never know for sure whether Robertson actually voted for Carter or Ford, but we do know that Carter's administration angered evangelicals to the point that Robertson and Falwell both became strident Republicans.

Carter's one term as president did much to move white evangelicals into the Republican column. As president, he did little to please the group and was very reluctant to speak out on issues like abortion and gay rights. Of particular concern to leaders like Billy Graham and Francis Schaeffer, the evangelical scholar whose work influenced a generation of conservative believers, was Carter's stance on abortion. The issue had been a troubling one for Carter during the campaign. He received significant support from both supporters and opponents of a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy. When pressed to take a stand, he usually acknowledged that he was personally opposed to abortion, but thought the best way to handle the issue was to enact measures that would make abortion less prevalent. These measures included support for poor families and a comprehensive program of sex education. Once in office, Carter adopted a moderately pro-choice stance in which he opposed both legal prohibition of abortion and federal funding of abortions. For religious conservatives, who were just beginning to develop a coherent ideology that centered on opposition to abortion, this stance was insufficient. In the minds of many evangelical leaders, including Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell, Carter's refusal to support a ban on abortions was an abdication of his responsibilities as an

[24]Oldfield, 88.

evangelical Christian.[25]

As journalists pressed Carter for details about his beliefs, he became less appealing to conservative evangelicals. Not only was he nominally pro-choice, but he was no inerrantist on the issue of biblical authority. He was influenced heavily by the writings of Richard Niebuhr, the liberal theologian who had been a critic of Billy Graham's in the 1950s. Carter also confessed that he had no problem with the occasional drink of alcohol and opposed the idea of returning organized prayer to public schools.[26] Perhaps the greatest frustration evangelicals had with Carter was his consistent support for the Equal Rights Amendment. First proposed in 1923 to ensure that women received the equal protection of the law, the amendment was opposed by social conservatives who viewed it as an attack on the traditional family structure and a liberal attempt at social engineering. Most evangelicals fell into this group, and Carter's advocacy for the amendment's passage was the final breach in his formerly collegial relationship with evangelicals. During his term in office, the debate over the amendment heated up significantly, with conservative leaders like Jerry Falwell organizing evangelicals to oppose it. When Carter refused to join their efforts and worked for the amendment's passage, he virtually ensured that his reelection bid would not garner the same level of evangelical support that his first campaign had.[27]

More than any other year, the 1980 presidential election assured that

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[25]Martin, 156. For a detailed discussion of the breakdown in relations between Carter and the emerging Christian Right, see Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party*, 133-158.
[26]Martin, 157.
[27]Williams, 127-28. See also Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 155-158.

southern evangelicals would become a major part of the Republican coalition. By 1980, religious conservatives were a much more cohesive group than they had been in 1976. During the intervening years, the fundamentalist Falwell had formed the Moral Majority, along with other conservative leaders. Although the Christian Right clearly had historical antecedents, the Moral Majority's founding in 1979 marked its formal beginning as an organized movement. Falwell dedicated his organization to galvanizing conservative Christians and involving them in politics by supporting candidates who made social conservatism a central focus of their campaigns. More so than just about any other politician, Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan understood the political power the group could hold if white evangelicals voted as a bloc.[28]

Although this group's disenchantment with Carter made Reagan's task easier, he did not have the advantage of Carter's evangelical background. Reagan was not "born again," at least not in the sense that most evangelicals used the term. When asked about the issue by a reporter, Reagan stumbled over his words and provided an answer that made clear he was no evangelical:

> In the religion of the church that I was raised in . . . you were baptized when you yourself declared that you were, as the Bible says, as the Bible puts it, that that is being born again. And so, it was, within the context of the Bible, yes, by being baptized.[29]

Without the luxury of an evangelical background, Reagan had to appeal directly to conservative believers by adopting both their issues and rhetoric.

Early on in the campaign, one of Reagan's advisers recognized the

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[28]Oldfield, 106-108.
[29]Ibid., 61. For more on the Reagan campaign of 1980, see Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008), 84-126.

potential for Republicans to add conservative Christians to their coalition. Donald Devine, himself a conservative Protestant, identified two historically Democratic demographic groups that could be enticed to vote Republican almost solely on the basis of the abortion issue: orthodox Catholics and evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants. While Carter worried that reaching out to conservative evangelicals would erode his liberal support, Reagan's campaign had far more to gain from an alliance with these voters than it stood to lose. Reagan had an advantage in that groups likely to be offended by strong stances on social issues, particularly feminists and civil libertarians, would not be supporting his candidacy anyway. As his campaign manager, Lee Atwater, put it, "We did not fear a backlash because . . . you can't lose support where you never had it in the first place."[30] After this deliberation, Reagan and his campaign openly courted evangelical and fundamentalist leaders. His messages increasingly emphasized traditional moral values and conservative religion. Speaking to the National Religious Broadcasters, Reagan proclaimed his belief that organized prayer should not have been taken out of public schools. He also met privately with leaders of the Christian Right. Significantly, he met with Falwell on several occasions and garnered the fundamentalist preacher's unequivocal support.[31]

Reagan was also selective in choosing which religious constituencies to meet with. He declined an invitation to address the more liberal National Council of Churches, but readily affiliated with the National Association of Evangelicals, a

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[30]Oldfield, 76.
[31]Ibid.

group of conservative Protestant leaders. Most importantly, Reagan made opposition to legal abortion a central theme of his campaign. Not only did he publicly state his support for a constitutional amendment banning abortion, but he repeatedly mentioned the issue in his speeches in the context of his support for a return to traditional values. In August 1980, Reagan made an appearance at a briefing of the Religious Roundtable, organized by conservative clergy. He told them, "I know you cannot endorse me, but I endorse you and what you are doing" and openly questioned the biological theory of evolution. While Reagan's appeals to religious conservatives clearly benefited his campaign, Carter was more constrained. If Carter sought the support of these newly organized voters, he would risk alienating the pro-choice community, supporters of gay rights, and liberals, all of whom were crucial to the Democratic base. The result was that Reagan made significant inroads with religiously conservative voters, while Carter's standing dropped. In the end, a majority of white evangelicals supported Reagan over Carter, solidifying the group as a very important base for Republican presidential candidates.[32]

Since 1980, GOP presidential candidates have counted on white evangelicals as a solid voting bloc; indeed, it is difficult to imagine several Republican victories without those voters. But historians should remember that Republican dominance of this powerful voting bloc is a relatively recent political phenomenon. Evangelicals voted overwhelmingly Democratic before the 1960s, and the shift to the Republican Party was not easy or uncomplicated. Texas

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[32]Ibid., 77-78. For more on Reagan's courting of conservative evangelicals, see Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), 123-140 and 155-200.

Baptists, the largest state organization of evangelicals in the country, found the rise of the Christian Right as an organized wing of the Republican Party to be a profoundly negative development. Their story should alter the prevailing narrative of an easy alliance between white, southern evangelicals and the Republican Party.

The Christian Right: What We Have Learned

Evangelical politics clearly has a long history in the United States. But the modern political movement that scholars call the Christian Right did not begin organizing until at least the 1960s, and it did not make its impact felt at the level of national politics until at least the 1976 campaign. For that reason, discussion of the Christian Right in this work will be limited to what Martin calls "the New Christian Right," the movement of conservative Christians who organized politically and reshaped national politics in the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond. It is that movement that scholars have struggled to understand, attempting to answer the question political scientist Justin Watson posited: "What do they *really* want (emphasis his)?"[33] While the answer to that question is not entirely clear, recent scholarship has at least given us a starting point for understanding the deepest impulses of the Christian Right and placing the movement in proper historical context.

First and foremost, leaders of the Christian Right have emphasized a stronger role for the government in regulating private morality. On issues from abortion rights to gay rights to school prayer and sexual education, the

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[33]Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition*, (New York: St. Martin's Griffin), 1.

movement has been ardent in opposing the separation of church and state and pushing government to become more involved in promoting a particular moral vision of America. Justin Watson, who spent years studying Pat Robertson's role in developing evangelical politics, found that the "restorationist impulse" of the Christian Right grew out of a desire to have government forcibly bring back a "return to a lost or golden era."[34] He aptly sums up the goals of the Christian Right: "This agenda is one of aggressively reasserting, through political and legal means as well as by persuasion, the public authority of evangelical belief and morality. Evangelicals who adopt this stance are interested in the restoration of a lost past in which life was better and more godly."[35] A lot can be said about whether that golden past ever existed in the first place, but the point is that millions of evangelical Christians believed that it needed to be restored and that government activism was the way to do it. On just about every social issue that has animated American politics, the Christian Right has advocated for a weakening of the wall separating the government (and its policies) from the private practice of faith.

James Davison Hunter has argued that differences over the church/state issue are fundamental to the "culture wars" waged by Christian conservatives in the political, legal, and media arenas. To him, Christian Right activists rejected the idea that the wall of separation should be "unapproachable and totally unbreachable."[36] They viewed strict separation as a liberal trick designed to

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[34]Watson, 89. For more on the Christian Right and church/state issues, see Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America,"* 17-19.
[35]Watson, 89.
[36]James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks,

guarantee that on questions like gender roles, reproductive rights, and the role of religion in public schools, society would move steadily away from traditional Christian understandings. In their view, "what is ultimately at stake is the ability to define the rules by which moral conflicts of this kind are to be resolved."[37] For Christian Right activists, undermining the separation of church and state was a way to ensure that their desired cultural outcomes came to fruition. As Hunter puts it, "Influencing the structure of the rules represents a critical part of the overall effort to reestablish an old or to formulate a new cultural hegemony."[38]

Pat Robertson himself has written extensively about what he sees as the menace of strict church/state separation. Echoing the work of conservative constitutionalists, he has argued that the Establishment Clause of the Constitution was used improperly by liberals to promote secularism. To him, the clause should have only one purpose: To ensure "that government should not set up an official sect or denomination . . . intervene in the internal affairs of religious institutions," or "give churches *official* representation in government (emphasis his)."[39] Beyond that, though, Robertson has not supported the separation of church and state, saying its defenders were part of "a determined effort to radically alter the historical understanding of separation."[40] Starting with *Engel vs. Vitale*, the 1963 Supreme Court decision banning organized prayer in public schools, courts have generally ruled that church/state separation requires government's neutrality in matters of religion. But Robertson and other Christian

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1991), 260.
[37]Ibid., 271.
[38]Ibid.
[39]Watson, 105.
[40]Ibid., 106.

Right leaders rejected that view, insisting that it "could lead to the removal of the religious world view from the political process."[41] To him, church/state separation should never mean "that religious ideals and ideas are to be excluded from the political and lawmaking process. Nor should it mean that government is (or should be) disabled from generally endorsing, promoting, or encouraging religious belief and practice, from acknowledging God, or even from giving certain forms of aid (including financial) that advance the cause of religion."[42] This general rejection of the separation of church and state (as understood and promoted by the courts) has been a hallmark of Christian Right politics, and it is nearly impossible to discuss the movement without analyzing its contempt for church/state separation.

Besides their emphasis on weakening the separation of church and state, Christians Right activists have also been known for an intense focus on issues of gender and sexuality, particularly conservative views on the subjects of women's roles, abortion rights, and homosexuality. When Jerry Falwell formed his Moral Majority in 1979, he immediately placed abortion "at the head of the list" in terms of its importance to evangelicals.[43] Of course, it was Roman Catholics who had been the original opponents of legal abortion in the years following *Roe vs. Wade*, but by 1979 huge numbers of conservative Protestants were equally

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[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid. For further reading on the Christian Right's growing disdain for the Supreme Court and its church/state rulings, see William Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 378-378-385. For more on Pat Robertson's views of the Supreme Court and church/state separation, see Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party*, 216-222.

[43]Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 200. For further reading on the Christian Right and abortion, see Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party*, 3-9; Walter H. Capps, *The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism and Politics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990); and Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 205-220.

passionate about the issue. After the founding of the Moral Majority, the issue would bedevil many Democratic candidates and provide conservative Republicans with an issue that could be used to galvanize millions of evangelical Protestants. Indeed, Carter's inability to articulate a strident anti-abortion message hurt his campaign with this group of voters and paved the way for Republican dominance in areas of the country influenced by conservative Protestant religion.[44]

But the Christian Right's opposition to abortion was never just about the revulsion many of its members held towards the practice itself; it was also tied up in a conservative vision of family life that rankled progressive voters and energized conservatives. James Davison Hunter puts it this way: "For pro-life activists, motherhood tends to be viewed as the most important and satisfying role open to a woman."[45] So viewed, abortion "represents an attack on the very activity that gives life meaning."[46] For many conservative Christians, "legalized abortion represents an assault on the mother's principle obligation and her source of identity" and "an attack on the very activity that gives life meaning."[47] For the pro-life movement, whose rise paralleled that of the Christian Right, abortion rights for women were a fundamental assault on the traditional roles for men and women that most evangelicals still supported.

The same was true for their position on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

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[44]Martin, 200-201.
[45]Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 186. For further reading on the Christian Right and LGBT issues, see Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 174-187 and 195-207; Mathew C. Moen, *The Transformation of the Christian Right* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 141-160; and Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party*, 145-156.
[46]Hunter, 186.
[47]Ibid., 186-87.

transgender (LGBT) rights, which by the late 1970s had already become a hot-button political topic. Liberals began pushing, ever so timidly, for legislation that would grant same-sex couples at least some of the same rights as married heterosexual couples. The Christian Right immediately organized against what they viewed as a liberal attack on the traditional family. Chuck McIlhenny, a Christian Right activist who worked to defeat pro-gay legislation in California, perfectly summed up the viewpoint of many conservative activists on the issue of gay rights. The movement for equal rights, he insisted, was an attempt "to redefine the marriage relationship and therefore the family itself"; it was nothing less than "a fundamental attack upon Christianity, a fundamental attack upon the traditional, biblical family and marriage ideal."[48] These activists never specified exactly how allowing LGBT families equal rights would harm their own families, but for many of them, the threat was so obvious it did not need articulation. Jerry Falwell himself became adamant about the issue of gay rights in the 1970s, inviting anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant to appear on his television show, *Old Time Gospel Hour*. He was so extreme in his hatred of homosexuality that he went public with his belief that the murder of Harvey Milk and George Moscone had been a judgment from God. Harvey Milk, of course, was San Francisco's first openly gay elected official, and Moscone, the city's mayor, was a close ally of the city's LGBT population.[49]

The Christian conservative community was generally opposed to abortion rights and LGBT rights by the mid-1970s, with many activists having already

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[48]Ibid., 4.
[49]Martin, 197-98.

begun work on those issues. But it was the National Women's Conference, held in Houston in 1977, that caused an irreparable breach between "family values" conservatives on one side and feminists and LGBT activists on the other. Congress had provided five million dollars to fund the conference and had asked for the conference to recommend ways to "identify barriers that prevent women from participating fully and equally in all aspects of national life."[50] Delegates to the convention included both conservative and liberal women, and even a good number of radical women who identified as socialists, radical feminists, or with some other ideology to the left of American liberalism. The convention easily ratified a twenty-five point plan, which included measures like extending Social Security benefits to housewives and an increase in funding for rape prevention. But three issues were not included in the original plan, and they would ultimately split the convention, causing conservative women to abandon efforts to work with the feminist movement. These issues were the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, and lesbian rights. A large majority of the delegates supported taking a liberal stance on all these issues, but *Time* magazine estimated that about 20 percent of the attendees (mostly from southern and western states) opposed any action on these topics. Ultimately, the supporters had an easy time passing resolutions in favor of the ERA, ensuring access to abortion, and advancing the rights of lesbian women. But the opposition withdrew from the convention over these issues.[51] Many of them echoed the stance of Phyllis Schlafley, who insisted that working with lesbians was detrimental to the cause of women's

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[50]Ibid., 163. For a detailed analysis of the conference, see Ruth Murray Brown, *For a "Christian America,"* 103-122.

[51]"Houston Produces New Alliances and a Drive for Grassroots Power," *Time*, December 5, 1977.

rights: "I remember the impassioned pleas by Betty Friedan . . . Saying, 'Yes, we have to work with the lesbians and they have to be part of our movement.' They did that on national television, and the American people saw it and they didn't like it."[52] The conservative women eventually abandoned the convention, joining up with a "pro-family" rally taking place across the street from the main convention.[53] The women at that rally mostly agreed with Jerry Falwell's assessment of the ERA: "We believe in opening the door for our women, helping them with their coats, providing them with their living, and protecting them from their enemies. We are against the Equal Rights Amendment because we believe it degrades womanhood, and may one day cause our women to use unisex toilets and fight in the trenches on the battlefield, where men belong."[54] From at least that moment in 1977, the Christian Right was associated in national politics with opposition to the feminist movement, particularly its stances in favor of abortion rights and the rights of lesbian and gay Americans.

Besides its conflicts with feminists and gay rights activists, the Christian Right was also defined by a somewhat ambivalent stance on the subject of African American advancement. The relationship between racist attitudes among whites in the South and the rise of the Christian Right is a subject of much contention, and one that historians and other scholars have only recently begun to analyze. But only the most ardent Christian Right defenders would claim that race and racism played no role in galvanizing the movement, led almost exclusively by whites and centered mostly in the South. Dan Carter has

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[52]Martin, 165.
[53]"The Three 'Hot-Button' Issues: ERA, Abortion, Lesbian Rights," *Time*, December 5, 1977.
[54]Martin, 163.

described how the overtly racist politics of George Wallace laid the groundwork for the Christian Right. "The genius of George Wallace," writes Carter, was his ability to connect conservatism to "cultural beliefs and symbols with a much broader appeal to millions of Americans: the sanctity of the traditional family, the certainty of overt religious beliefs, the importance of hard work and self-restraint, the celebration of the autonomous local community."[55] Joseph Crespino has argued that by the mid-1960s, many southern evangelicals "saw the civil rights drive as the leading wedge in a much larger and broader movement rooted in a modern liberal theology that was corrupting the mission of the church and threatening traditional practices in their communities and churches."[56] Paul Harvey has noted that white southern evangelicals initially embraced a politics that resisted integration "when the moderate elites in charge of denominational leadership angered conservative Christians in local communities by supporting measures of desegregation."[57] Eventually, though, these same conservatives abandoned the overt racism of their past (largely, Harvey notes, for reasons of political expediency) and moved to embrace gender norms as their chief political cause. "For the contemporary religious right, in short, gender has supplanted race as the bedrock defining principle of God-ordained hierarchy," he writes.[58]

Without question, the mass organization of conservative Christians in the 1970s and early 1980s coincided with a new Republican politics of cultural

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[55]Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1995), 12.
[56]Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 12.
[57]Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 219.
[58]Ibid, 219-220.

grievance that pitted white, middle-class southerners against African Americans who remained very loyal to the Democratic Party. At the very least, historians and political scientists would agree that race was a major factor, if not the only factor, in drawing white evangelicals to the Republican cause and fueling a divided racial politics in the South. From their lukewarm reaction to integration to their massive exodus from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, white evangelicals were among the last to embrace the sweeping racial changes that ended Jim Crow in the South and created a space in which African Americans could exercise real political power. Certainly, scholars would be wrong to assume a monolithic evangelical reaction to racial issues or to assume that Christian Right activists were just as racist as they were homophobic or antifeminist. To do so would be to oversimplify a movement that is rife with complexities. But there is little doubt that Christian Right politics merged rather easily with the politics of cultural resentment, with many white southerners drawn to the Republican Party both for its affiliation with Christian social issues and for its refusal to embrace African American advancement.

Without question, the Christian Right is a diverse movement with a number of competing impulses. But a clear picture emerges from the scholarship of a movement that is hostile to the separation of church and state, adamantly committed to strict gender roles, opposed to abortion and gay rights, and comfortable with the racial status quo. The movement has demonstrated these qualities time and again, and few scholars would deny that these characteristics have defined the political involvement of white evangelicals since 1960. Still, the

scholarship has been too quick to assume hegemony among conservative, religiously devout whites in the South. To read much of this scholarship is to assume that, for the most part, white southern evangelicals made a rather easy transition to the politics of social conservatism and merged seamlessly with the Republican coalition that was emerging at the time. But what about those southern evangelicals who did not ally with the Christian Right or the Republican Party? They have been given so little scholarly attention that readers might assume they never existed in the first place. It is to that group of southerners that historians must turn their attention in order to understand the changes that swept the South and the nation after 1960. Not only did such southerners exist, but they existed in large numbers. Their experiences should complicate our understanding of southern and national politics during the Republican-dominated years of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. For if the transformation of white evangelicals into foot soldiers of the Christian Right was not as easy as scholars have imagined, perhaps the great changes that rocked national politics during these years were not as inevitable or unavoidable as those same scholars have led us to believe.

Texas Baptists and the Rise of the Christian Right

The story of Texas Baptists and the rise of the Christian Right is one that will certainly seem counterintuitive to many historians. Texas Baptists made up the country's largest statewide organization of Southern Baptists, and they wielded a great deal of influence in the national Southern Baptist Convention and in state and national politics. The Baptist General Convention of Texas, as the

state Baptist convention was formally known, was made up almost exclusively of whites, nearly all of whom were far more conservative on theological issues than the country at large. Not only were they committed to a conservative, orthodox interpretation of the Bible, but they rejected outright the liberalism they believed was dominant in mainline Protestant denominations like the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church of the USA, and the Presbyterian Church, USA. They shared many of the social views of the Christian Right, believing abortion to be against God's will and certain that homosexuality was a sinful perversion against nature. On nearly every religious issue, Texas Baptists were on the far end of the theological spectrum, always outpacing their more moderate Protestant brethren when it came to a literal interpretation of the Bible. In short, they were exactly the kind of southern Protestants that scholars might expect to find allying with the Christian Right and moving to embrace Republican politics.

But Texas Baptists not only rejected an alliance with the Christian Right, they did so emphatically. On a wide range of issues, they broke with the leaders of American evangelicalism and charted a unique course that held fast to their theological conservatism, yet rejected the embrace of Republican politics that characterized many of their southern evangelical counterparts in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Why they did so should be a question of utmost importance to scholars interested in the rise of the Christian Right, as well as historians grappling with the move towards Republican dominance in the South during these years. Not only is the experience of Texas Baptists surprising, given the current scholarship on American evangelicals; it is also instructive about how this

important group has been examined in the literature. It calls into question previous notions about the seamlessness of evangelicals' transition to Republican politics and strikes at the argument that Republican dominance of the South was a foregone conclusion, given its religious impulses.

To understand why Texas Baptists reacted so differently to the rise of the Christian Right than did many other evangelicals, historians must first understand the historic Baptist support for the separation of church and state. As historian Bill Leonard has documented, Southern Baptists have historically been among the most ardent defenders of church/state separation, largely due to their history as a persecuted religious group in early US history.[59] While many Southern Baptists gradually shifted away from these beliefs after 1960, Texas Baptists defended them, influenced by strong leaders with a history of activism on church/state issues and inspired by a disdain for Baptist fundamentalists, who were beginning to gain power in the national convention.[60]

In Chapter One, I discuss the strong support that Texas Baptist leaders exhibited for the separation of church and state in the 1960s. On issues like school prayer, funding for parochial schools, and even the 1960 presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy, they insisted on the strictest of lines between government prerogatives and private religious activity. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of their activism during this period was that it was simply a continuation of earlier work by leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention. While contemporary readers might not associate issues of church/state separation with

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[59]Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 157.
[60]For more on the war between fundamentalists and moderates in the SBC, see Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*; Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*; and Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*.

evangelicals, Southern Baptists in Texas had been preaching the virtues of strict separation for many years, as had leaders of the national convention. In Chapter Two, I examine Texas Baptists' politics in the 1970s, where they again proved willing to take a strong stand against any promotion of religion by the government. Not only did they celebrate Supreme Court rulings prohibiting organized prayer in public schools, they also agitated against efforts to amend the Constitution to allow for such activities. When Jesse Helms, the staunch conservative senator from North Carolina, reached out to Baptists to organize support for such an amendment, he faced some of his fiercest opposition from Texas Baptists. For historians examining the rise of the Christian Right, it is important to note that in opposing Helms' efforts, Texas Baptists were in sync with the leadership of the national Southern Baptist Convention, which had not yet come under the control of Baptist fundamentalists.

In Chapter Three, I explain the battle between moderates and fundamentalists for control of the Southern Baptist Convention and its impact on shaping Texas Baptist responses to national politics. To put it simply, Texas Baptists were on the losing side of a denominational struggle for the soul of the SBC. That struggle pitted two competing visions of Baptist belief against one another. On the fundamentalist side, leaders like Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler argued that the denomination was drifting towards liberalism and sought to gain complete control over its institutions. On the moderate side, Baptists like James Dunn and Foy Valentine insisted that the denomination was sufficiently conservative and viewed the fundamentalist crusade as little more than a power

grab. Fundamentalists ultimately won the conflict, seizing control of various Baptist institutions and pushing a more overtly political agenda for the SBC. Texas Baptists developed a distaste for this brand of conservative politics and were particularly defensive of Texas institutions like Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. They viewed fundamentalist attacks against these schools as outrageous and sought to keep the schools as autonomous as possible. They ultimately moved to protect these schools from fundamentalist influence, even going so far as to found the George W. Truett Theological Seminary as a haven for Baptist pastoral students who resisted a fundamentalist interpretation of Baptist theology. The fundamentalist takeover of the SBC was a formative experience for many Texas Baptists, and it instilled in them a disdain for the politics of the Christian Right. Because Baptist fundamentalists were often allied with Christian Right leaders like Jerry Falwell, their growing influence in the SBC only deepened the chasm between Texas Baptists and the Christian Right.

In chapter four, I examine the role that gender politics played in splitting Texas Baptists from the emerging Christian Right movement. As the Southern Baptist Convention moved to the right on the issue of abortion, Texas Baptists became more and more uncomfortable with the blurring of lines between the government and citizens' private religious decisions. To be sure, Texas Baptists never celebrated abortion rights, nor were they ever at ease with a full-throated defense of women's reproductive freedom. But they rejected the notion of heavy government involvement, arguing that the matter was a private religious one that should be handled in churches and homes, not debated in political campaigns.

Beyond the issue of abortion, Texas Baptists defended the right of Baptist women to take leadership roles in the church and fought against the fundamentalist attempt to ban Baptist churches from ordaining women as ministers. Once again, Texas Baptists were not crusaders on the issue of women's rights. But they were turned off by fundamentalist attempts to enforce denominational purity, believing it would split the convention and reduce Baptist influence. They also defended Texas institutions like Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary that were more welcoming to women leaders than the denomination at large. Ultimately, the disagreements over abortion rights and women ministers helped solidify the rift between Texas Baptists and the fundamentalists who came to lead the national convention.

In chapter five, I describe the Texas Baptist response to poverty in the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrating how their more liberal outlook on economic issues led them away from an alliance with the Christian Right and the Republican Party. As many southern whites began to embrace conservative economic policies in the 1960s and 1970s, Texas Baptists moved in a different direction. Not only did they insist that Christians had a responsibility to help the poor, but they extended that belief out of the private sphere and into the very public arena of state politics. Often working with liberal legislators like Houston's Barbara Jordan, Texas Baptists repeatedly led campaigns to raise the welfare limit in Texas. In these campaigns, they offered a passionate defense of government activism, using an assortment of evidence to show that the welfare program of Texas deserved protection and defending it from conservative

attacks. In the 1960s and 1970s, the *Baptist Standard* ran article after article that readers might expect to see in liberal political journals, but not in the largest state Baptist magazine in the country. Besides their political and spiritual defense of government programs to help the poor, Texas Baptists also conducted their own unique poverty relief efforts, often working with organizers from Lyndon Johnson's Community Action Program (CAP). From a campaign to ensure clean drinking water to a robust defense of bilingual education to job training in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas Baptists demonstrated a concern for social activism that distinguished them from many other evangelicals in the South. That activism also placed them on the opposite side of Christian Right leaders, who were already joining the conservative critique of government programs and allying with economic conservatives of various stripes.

In chapter six, I examine the role that racial politics played in Texas Baptist life. At the same point that many southern whites were developing a politics of cultural grievance, Texas Baptists actually worked towards moderation and, in some cases, racial liberalism. Leaders in the Baptist General Convention of Texas conducted conferences to prepare for (and encourage) integration, while editors at the *Baptist Standard* wrote eloquently of the need for southerners to move away from their racist pasts. While other southern evangelicals grew angry at the prospect of integration, Texas Baptists often welcomed it. If the story of white evangelicals and race was mostly a negative one, Texas Baptist leaders provided courageous examples that belied the larger narrative. Through the Texas Christian Life Commission, they pushed for more integrated churches,

insisted on accepting desegregation, and espoused the view that Christians ought to be on the front lines of the fight for racial equality.

On each of these issues, Texas Baptists provide a strong counterpoint to the conventional understanding of white southern evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s. There is little doubt that Texas Baptists were, in many respects, the exception to the rule. Unlike Baptists in most other states, they had a long history with academic institutions like Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary that were under their control. These institutions were by no means liberal, but they did provide a moderating force on issues like church/state separation, social activism, women's advancement, and racial justice. Defending these schools from fundamentalist attacks was certainly a critical part of the split between Texas Baptists and Christian Right leaders. Additionally, Texas Baptists were influenced by the work of the Texas Christian Life Commission, the social activist arm of their state convention. The leaders in that organization tended to be more liberal on issues and helped pull Texas Baptists in a more moderate direction than their counterparts in places like Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The presence of the *Baptist Standard* also provided a pull to the left, with an editorial staff that was certainly more liberal than the rank-and-file Baptists who read its pages each month. No doubt, each of these factors influenced Texas Baptists, pushing them towards a more moderate politics and away from the hard-edged conservatism of leaders in the national convention.

But to write Texas Baptists off as an exception to the rule is to miss a chance for reevaluating our understanding of southern politics in the years after

1960, particularly among the white evangelicals who eventually made up the base of the Christian Right and the Republican Party. The experience of Texas Baptists during these years suggests that the transition of white evangelicals into the Christian Right and, by extension, the GOP was not as simple as the current scholarship indicates. That the largest Baptist state convention in the country would offer a robust critique of the Christian Right should give pause to those who have assumed that Baptists were a natural fit for the movement because of their deeply-felt theological conservatism. Texas Baptists were also quite orthodox on religious issues, but they resisted the strident conservative politics that came to dominate the South and reshaped American elections. Their story implies that the Baptist alliance with the Republican Party was not the inevitable result of Baptist theology. If such a large and important group of Southern Baptists could emphatically reject the politics of the Christian Right, perhaps historians have been too quick to dismiss the experience of white southerners who were theologically conservative but did not find an easy home in the Christian Right or the Republican Party. My hope is that this study will push religious and political historians to rethink the common wisdom that white evangelicals were uniformly celebratory of these two institutions. At the very least, it should remind us that white evangelicals as a group were far more complicated in their theology, their political activism, and their views on controversial issues than current discussions seem to imply. For historians wondering where southern moderates fit into the great political changes that rocked American politics after 1960, one thing is clear: Texas is an important

starting point. Southern Baptists in that state provide a compelling and surprising case study that should alter our understandings and temper our previous conclusions.

Chapter 1

A Firm Foundation: Texas Baptists and the Separation of Church and State, 1960-1970

The 1984 presidential election pitted the popular Republican incumbent, Ronald Reagan, against the Democratic challenger Walter Mondale. By then, a majority of white southerners had staked out a position of strong support for the Republican Party in general and its 1984 standard bearer in particular. That fall, 81 percent of Southern Baptist ministers voted for Reagan, the highest recorded percentage up to that point for a Republican candidate.[1] Despite that trend, the *Baptist Standard*, the newsmagazine of Texas Baptists, refused to support either candidate and ran several editorials seeming to support Mondale's position on the proper relationship between church and state. Noting that a great deal of "political thunder" had erupted between the two candidates on church/state issues, the editors came to the quick defense of those arguing for a strict separation. The editorial quoted the most famous champion of religious liberty and church/state separation, Thomas Jefferson: "Believing with you that religion lies solely between a man and his God . . . I contemplate with solemn reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature shall 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and state." Critiquing those who believed the separation of church and state was a "modern

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[1]James L. Guth, "Southern Baptist Clergy, the Christian Right, and Political Activism in the South," in Glen Feldman, ed., *Religion and Politics in the White South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), 192.

invention," the editors insisted that it was "mostly a Baptist achievement" and warned that, "No revision of history can write out the constitutional concept of separation of church and state." Finally, the editorial proclaimed boldly, "As champions of religious liberty and separation of church and state, Southern Baptists should be at the front in shedding light on the subject."[2]

That the official news organ of the country's largest state organization of Southern Baptists would run such an editorial might be surprising to contemporary observers of white evangelical politics. The editorial's basic premise flies in the face of the Christian Right's agenda and, by extension, that of the modern Republican Party. But in taking their 1984 stance, Texas Baptists were actually acting in a long Baptist tradition of supporting the separation of church and state. They were also expressing their discomfort with the increasingly political stances of the SBC and the acceptance of the Christian Right's agenda by broad swaths of the white evangelical South. The reasons for Texas Baptists' reluctance to follow their denomination's drift towards Republican activism and an alliance with the Christian Right are complicated, and they touch on issues of race, gender, and intra-denominational politics. But their unwavering support for the traditional Baptist view on the separation of church and state was clearly the most powerful force in preventing any kind of partnership with leaders of the Christian Right and the Republican Party.

Long before abortion, gay rights, and school prayer became the chief issues for many white southerners, Texas Baptists had developed a tradition of

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[2]"Shedding Light on Separation of Church-State," *The Baptist Standard*, September 19, 1984, 6 (all quotations).

strong support for the separation of church and state. Although they ultimately parted ways with many other Southern Baptists, who more or less abandoned the separation of church and state as a guiding principle, Texas Baptists were originally on the same page with the national convention and quite consistent with the historic emphases of nearly all Baptists. Church historian Bill Leonard is surely correct in his assessment that Baptists have been "among the most outspoken advocates of religious liberty in modern Protestant history." As he notes, they have most often "identified themselves with . . . a general support for the separation of church and state, the belief that government should not interfere in matters of religion." That conviction has manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout Baptists' history in the United States, but an unwavering commitment to each individual's right to make her own religious choices has been a hallmark of the Baptist faith. The earliest Baptists' experiences in Europe had a profound impact on their actions in the United States, leading them to establish a tradition of supporting church/state separation that Texas Baptists ultimately carried on. To use Leonard's phrase, the earliest American Baptists "were not satisfied to receive the crumbs of mere tolerance doled out by assorted state-supported religious establishments in England and colonial America. Rather, they demanded complete religious freedom for heretic and unbeliever alike."[3] Leonard acknowledges that different groups of Baptists have offered varying interpretations on the theme of religious liberty generally and separation of church and state specifically. But, as he notes, a fair reading of the Baptist

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[3]Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 157 (all quotations).

experience in the United States suggests that they were among the most ardent defenders of the separation of church and state for much of that time.

In the second half of the twentieth century Baptists became divided over these issues, and a group arguing against strict separation ultimately triumphed within the Southern Baptist Convention. But Texas Baptists refused to concede the point, and nearly every decision they made about national or denominational politics reflected their strident belief in the separation of church and state. To Texas Baptist leaders, abandoning that emphasis would have been akin to forsaking their heritage as Baptists and Christians in America. To fully understand their complicated relationship with the Christian Right and their response to politics after 1960, historians must contend with their views on church/state separation. For it is that element of their ideology that most influenced them to reject any alliance with the burgeoning movement of religious conservatives in the 1970s and 1980s. By the time the Christian Right formally organized, Texas Baptists had already staked their claim on the side of church/state separation. Their activities in the 1960s and early 1970s demonstrate clearly some of the reasons they would ultimately offer a different response to the Christian Right than many of their southern counterparts.

The 1960 presidential election ushered in a new wave of concern for Texas Baptists and inspired many state leaders to reaffirm their commitment to the separation of church and state. The candidacy of John F. Kennedy, only the second Catholic to run for president on a major party ticket, prompted a renewal of discussion about the historic Baptist belief in the separation of church and

state. Unfortunately, this renewal was characterized by a flurry of anti-Catholicism and not a few ridiculous allegations that had little or no bearing in political realities. For Texas Baptists, the 1960 election brought to the fore issues that had first arisen with the 1928 presidential candidacy of Al Smith, another Catholic Democrat, who ran against incumbent Republican president Herbert Hoover. In that election, J. Frank Norris, the popular pastor of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, actively campaigned against Al Smith. Calling Smith a "wet-catholic," he traveled across the state on behalf of Hoover, whom he referred to as "that Christian gentleman." Over a period of fourteen weeks, Norris delivered 119 speeches in thirty different cities, and he made no secret of his anti-Catholicism. He invoked the specter of Dark Age persecution, viciously attacked the Pope, and insisted that a Smith election would represent the end of religious liberty in the United States. For good measure, he ended most of his speeches with a fervent appeal to "mother, flag, God, the Bible, and Herbert Hoover."[4] The 1960 election held a number of lows for Texas Baptists in terms of blatant anti-Catholicism, but it surely did not rival the intensity and venom of Norris' explicit attacks on Al Smith. In 1960, Texas Baptists tended to express their arguments in a less audacious way. Their concerns about Catholic power were also inextricably merged with a serious defense of the separation of church and state.

By any measure, it is fair to say that Texas Baptist leaders were among the most difficult for Kennedy to assure that his interest was in governing the

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[4]John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 1986), 204.

entire country, not in promoting the agenda of one religion. The *Baptist Standard* ran several articles questioning whether Kennedy would be able to avoid doing the bidding of Catholic leaders.[5] Leading the charge was Baptist journalist E. S. James, a strong proponent of church/state separation and editor of the *Standard*. He insisted that Kennedy could only allay his concerns by renouncing his supposed "allegiance to the foreign religio-political state at the Vatican" and issuing "a declaration of freedom from the domination of the clergy."[6] But Kennedy had made clear early in his campaign that he would be a strong proponent of the separation of church and state. In particular, he gave an interview to *Life* magazine in which he made explicit his intention not to take political marching orders from Catholic prelates.[7] So when James continued to criticize him from the pages of the *Baptist Standard*, Kennedy offered a reply to the news magazine. Noting his previous statements, he sought to reassure Baptist voters: "I thought my previous expressions have made it perfectly clear that . . . my undivided political allegiance is to the best interests of this country." Going further, he insisted that he determined those interests "on the basis of my best conscientious judgment, without domination from any source."[8] While James applauded Kennedy's statements, he refused to let up and continued voicing his church/state concerns right through the November election. Unfortunately, the Catholic press did little to aid Kennedy's efforts to assuage Protestant fears, particularly the concerns about keeping church and state separate. Following

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[5]For examples, see the *Baptist Standard* , Feb. 3, 1960, pgs 3-4; February 17, 1960, pgs 3-4; and May 4, 1960, pg. 3.
[6]Storey, 204.
[7]Ibid.
[8]"Kennedy Responds," *Baptist Standard*, May 4, 1960, pg. 3.

Kennedy's statements to the *Baptist Standard*, a Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, disputed Kennedy's claims. Its editors concluded that the Catholic leadership had a "duty and right to guide, direct, and correct" members of its laity in political matters. James pounced on these statements and used them as evidence that despite Kennedy's protestations to the contrary, no Catholic politician could truly be free of church influence in matters of governance.[9]

One of the most ardent sources of pro-separation sentiment came from the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC). The Commission had been founded in 1951 as a body operating under the auspices of the state convention. Pioneering pastors like J. Howard Williams, T. B. Maston, and A. C. Miller founded the TCLC to deal with the moral aspects of various social issues. At the time of its founding, these leaders specifically targeted six issues: the family, race relations, the economy, the "world order," public morals, and the "scriptural basis on moral issues." Miller led the Commission in its early days, but Foy Valentine succeeded him in 1953. He served until 1960 when Jimmy Allen took over the leadership role.[10] During the 1960 election, Allen shared the views of other Texas Baptist leaders in wondering if Kennedy could ever be truly independent of his church. "We were all rather skeptical that he could indeed carry through with his position because there were such pressures with the hierarchical church on

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[9]Storey, 205.
[10]Joseph E. Early, Jr., *A Texas Baptist History Sourcebook: A Companion to McBeth's Texas Baptists*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), 346. For a more detailed discussion of the founding of the TCLC, see Storey, pgs. 122-143.

the subject at that time," he recalled.[11] As the decade progressed, the TCLC would become an even stronger advocate for Texas Baptists to defend a strict separation between church and state.

James and Allen were not alone in their reaction to Kennedy's candidacy, and not all Texas Baptists shared their willingness to avoid overt statements of anti-Catholicism. W. A. Criswell, the longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, insisted that to be a faithful Catholic was to heed all political directives of the church leadership. In his mind, Kennedy was "either a poor Catholic" or "just stringing people along." He believed that electing one Catholic president would inevitably lead to another, who might give "the pope his ambassador, the church schools state support, and finally recognition of one church above all others in America." Blake Smith, pastor of the relatively liberal University Baptist Church in Austin, announced his belief that the election of a Catholic president would not harm the separation of church and state in a September sermon. The Austin Baptist Pastors' Association quickly condemned his statements by a vote of 25 to 3.[12]

The national Southern Baptist leadership followed a similar pattern. At the convention's annual meeting, attendees affirmed the traditional Baptist commitment to the separation of church and state, but added special statements unique to the ongoing presidential election. In a confusing statement, the convention affirmed the right of any man to choose his own religion and that personal faith should not be a test for national political office. But those

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[11]Allen, Jimmy. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (August 27, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 133.
[12]Storey, 206 (first quotation), 205 (second quotation).

statements were followed by a resolution that seemed to do just that: "When a public official is inescapably bound by the dogma and demands of his church, he cannot consistently separate himself from these." The resolution continued: "This is especially true when that church maintains a position in open conflict with our American way of life as specifically related to religious liberty, separation of church and state, the freedom of conscience in matters related to marriage and the family, the perpetuation of free public schools and the prohibition against the use of public monies for sectarian purposes."[13] Without mentioning the words "Kennedy" or "Catholic," the resolution came very close to putting the denomination on record in opposition to the Democratic ticket. Ironically, it did so in the name of the separation of church and state.

Although the relationship between Texas Baptists and the Kennedy candidacy remained strained throughout the 1960 election, the addition of Texan Lyndon Johnson to the Democratic ticket at least opened a new line of communication between Kennedy and BGCT leaders. According to Jimmy Allen, Kennedy found Texas Baptists mysterious from the very beginning: "John Kennedy couldn't figure us out . . . 'Who are these people' was his basic question."[14] But in Johnson, Texas Baptists found a politician who, at the very least, understood the historical and theological concerns they were expressing, even if his motives were transparently political. In this respect, Bill Moyers, an influential aide to Johnson, served as a crucial liaison between the two camps. A

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[13]John Wicklein, "Baptists Question Vote for Catholic," *The New York Times*, May 21, 1960, Section A, 12.
[14]Allen, Jimmy. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (August 27, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 133.

Texan himself, he had once roomed with Bill Pinson, who served as Allen's associate at the TCLC. Soon after Johnson joined the ticket, Moyers called Allen to inform him that he had just spent an hour and a half briefing the vice-presidential candidate on the specific concerns of Texas Baptists. Ultimately, Kennedy's famous declaration of independence from the Catholic hierarchy came as a result of Moyer's work. It was at his behest that Kennedy agreed to meet with Houston-area pastors; his assuagement of many Protestants with his comments is by now political legend.[15] The Catholic Democrat never convinced Texas Baptist leaders that he was totally free of influence from his church, but Moyers' work and Kennedy's masterful political maneuvering went a long way towards helping him narrowly win the state of Texas that fall.

Texas Baptist leaders were especially tough on John Kennedy on church/state separation, but they were no pushovers when it came to Republican Richard Nixon's handling of aid to private schools. Even before Nixon addressed the issue, E. S. James had ruffled Republican feathers by running an editorial attacking the GOP vice-presidential candidate Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., for supporting aid to parochial schools. When Kennedy tried to court James later in the campaign, the senator remembered James' attack on Cabot Lodge and admired him for it. Of course, the entire Cabot Lodge family was well known to be an enemy of the Kennedy's.[16] A little-known fact of the campaign for Texas' electoral votes is that, for all his haranguing of John Kennedy, E. S. James also

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[15]Ibid. Also, see Wayne Phillips, "Johnson Decries Religious Issue," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1960, Section A, 15.

[16]"Vice-Presidential Candidate Supports Aid to Private Schools," *Baptist Standard*, July 7, 1960, 2. Also see Allen, Jimmy. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (August 27, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 135.

broke an important story on Nixon's tacit support for federal aid to private schools. James' first cousin, Jack Porter of Houston, served on the Republican National Executive Committee. James used the connection to pressure the Nixon campaign to go public with a position on federal aid to private academies. Eventually, James broke the story in the *Standard*, describing the Nixon campaign's position. In typical fashion, Nixon tried to finesse the topic, but he finally conceded that he would support such funding, though he insisted that it go to the states first where local officials would decide how the money was spent.[17]

Jimmy Allen later noted that James' willingness to attack Nixon infuriated those Baptists who were opposed to Kennedy strictly on grounds of anti-Catholic prejudice: "To everybody's consternation who had tried to use the hate the Catholic theme, Dr. James . . . came out to say (of Nixon) 'This man is wrong.'"[18] The publication of such an article in the most widely distributed publication of Texas Baptists was not insignificant in a state that was listed as a "tossup" right up to the election.[19] In the final results, Kennedy beat Nixon in Texas by a mere 45, 264 votes out of 2,288,940 cast, one of the closest state contests in the nation.[20] No one can be sure how much impact James' editorials had, but at least one Texas Baptist credits his Nixon article with helping put Kennedy over the top. Allen later stated that it was "a pretty well accepted political judgment that that editorial in the *Baptist Standard* tilted the scales in Texas . . . toward John Kennedy carrying the state, because it released enough

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[17]E. S. James, "Nixon Supports Federal Money to Private Schools," August 23, 1960, *Baptist Standard*, 2.
[18]Allen, Jimmy. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (August 27, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 135.
[19]"17 States Views as Election Key," *The New York Times*, October 18, 1960, Section A, 46.
[20]"Presidential Vote Totals," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1960, Section A, 71.

tension on the part of Baptists who were ordinarily Democrats to say to them, 'I am not betraying my position as a believer in religious liberty to vote for John Kennedy.'" James' relationship with Kennedy continued to thaw during Kennedy's administration, particularly when James concluded that Kennedy was living up to his campaign commitment to defend the separation of church and state. When Kennedy was assassinated, James attended the funeral at the request of the family.[21] Whatever the political implications of James' article, his work at least made clear that not all Texas Baptists were consumed with hatred of Kennedy. James took an equally tough line with Nixon, and his comments regarding both candidates were issue-based.

While anti-Catholicism clearly played a role in the hysteria surrounding the possible election of John Kennedy, the response of Texas Baptist leaders was more complicated and involved deeper issues than fear of Catholic political power. It was also reflective of a distinctly Baptist ideology that emphasized the separation of church and state as a moral and political imperative. In 1960, no one could have imagined that just twenty years later a new movement of religious conservatives would rise to power. Issues like abortion and gay rights had not yet entered the lexicon of American politics, and few observers gave much thought to their salience as social issues. But the 1960 election was an early indication that, when pressed, Texas Baptists would come down firmly on the side of church/state separation. Although their entreaties against Kennedy's candidacy were laced with assumptions about Catholics that would today pass

[21]Allen, Jimmy. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (August 27, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 135.

for intolerance, they also reflected a powerful belief in the Baptist heritage of support for the separation of church and state. As the decade passed, Texas Baptists would remain fierce warriors in the battle to keep government decisions separate from the religious views of any one denomination.

Following Kennedy's election, E. S. James admonished Baptists to support the new president "so long as he is in the right." He also insisted that Kennedy was "entitled to our prayers daily and to the best encouragement we can give him."[22] Ultimately, he came to view Kennedy as "sound" on issues of church/state separation and to consider Kennedy a friend.[23] Jimmy Allen, who had worried about whether Kennedy could truly separate his political duties from his religious faith, came to believe that Kennedy was indeed telling the truth about his intentions to keep church and state separate. He later stated that, "In retrospect . . . we probably had not had as effective a lever for religious liberty and separation of church and state in the executive branch in the history of our country at least since the Thomas Jefferson days as we had during the three year term of John Kennedy." To Allen, the reason for this trend was that Kennedy "politically could take the Catholic vote for granted and therefore had to play to people who were in the opposing camp."[24] By the end of the decade, James had also experienced a change of heart about Kennedy. "I was just as sincere as I could be in my belief that no Roman Catholic would be allowed to make his own decisions without help from the Vatican, and I didn't think America could use that

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[22]E. S. James, "New President Deserves Support," November 11, 1960, *Baptist Standard*, 2 .
[23]Storey, 207 (both quotations).
[24]Allen, Jimmy. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (August 27, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 139.

kind of a president," he said. But Kennedy's three years as president did more to convince James that his assumptions were incorrect than all his campaign's attempts to sway Texas Baptists. James ultimately conceded, "When he became president, he proved to us that a Catholic can make his own decisions, that he can be fair to all people."[25] Kennedy's gracious treatment of James, despite James' very public reservations about Catholic politicians and Kennedy's candidacy, seems to have helped the two form an unlikely friendship. James has stated on the record that Kennedy called him personally the night before his death. Kennedy was in Texas, of course, and wanted James to attend a luncheon the following day, which James agreed to do. James and his wife were at the luncheon waiting to see Kennedy when they received the news of his assassination. Ultimately, James came to view their relationship with great favor: "We had a rather personal relationship, between an ordinary country man and the President of the United States, but I enjoyed it and he was most gracious to me. And incidentally, he did more to keep church and state separated than any other President we've had in my lifetime."[26]

Despite this thawing of relations, Texas Baptists remained concerned about specific issues. The most important of these during the shortened Kennedy administration was federal aid to private schools, particularly Catholic ones. On the surface, aid to private schools might not seem like a dividing issue for Baptists and Catholics. As the Christian Right gained power in the late 1970s and early 1980s (and southern whites were increasingly forced to send their children

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[25]James, E. S. Oral Memoirs of E. S. James. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (August 5, 1971), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 104 (both quotations).
[26]Ibid.

to schools with black students), Protestant schools grew rapidly. But during the early years of Kennedy's administration, a huge discrepancy existed between Catholic schools and other private religious academies. In 1960, approximately 3.5 million students attended parochial schools, compared to 225,000 at Protestant schools and 22,000 at Jewish ones. As Kennedy's administration began, Texas Baptists worried that Catholics would push for public funding of these schools, and prominent Catholic leaders had already gone on record supporting such aid. The Supreme Court's *Everson vs. Board of Education* decision in 1947 had deemed direct funding of private schools unconstitutional, but it had not examined the issues of federal aid for transportation, school heath care, school lunches, and textbooks that were not religious in nature. Supporters hoped that Kennedy's election would help their cause, and the issue was politically provocative in 1960.[27] Citing theological and political concerns about the divide between government and church organizations, Texas Baptists staked out a clear position against public funding of parochial (or any) private schools.

In educating Baptists on issues of church/state separation and promoting a pro-separation position, no agency was more influential than the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA). A prominent Texas Baptist, J. M. Dawson, was instrumental in creating the agency, and he served as its head from 1946 to 1953. Dawson was a longtime pastor in Waco, Texas, and the J. M. Dawson Institute for Church State Studies at Baylor University is a testament to his legacy. The Institute was named for Dawson because of his ardent advocacy on

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[27]Storey, 208.

behalf of church/state separation and religious liberty.[28] The BJCPA focused primarily on advocacy for the separation of church and state. During the 1960s, it played a particularly important role in organizing against any federal funding of private religious schools. During the 1950s, Dawson had issued clear warnings to Baptists about the employment of nuns in public schools, the use of publicly-funded buses for transporting students to parochial schools, federal grants for the construction of religious schools, and a number of actions by local school boards (usually ones dominated by Catholics) that he considered antithetical to the country's legal traditions of church/state separation.[29]

One specific case in the early 1960s seemed to confirm Texas Baptists' suspicions that government monies were being used for private religious purposes. In Bremond, a small town in east central Texas that consisted almost entirely of Catholics, an elementary school became the cause for controversy. Starting in 1948, the local school board leased a public building to St. Mary's Elementary School for the ridiculous sum of one dollar per year. The school essentially operated on the basis of government funding, with publicly-financed school buses taking the children to school each day. But despite its source of funding, the school functioned largely as a private Catholic school. The faculty was composed almost entirely of nuns, who wore religious garb to work each day, Catholic imagery filled the school's walls and billboards, priests often visited the school, and an entire section of the library was dedicated to Catholic literature. By 1958, the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC) had taken

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[28]Ibid., 6-7.
[29]Ibid., 208.

notice of the issue. Foy Valentine headed the TCLC at the time, and he was instrumental in forming the Citizens' Association for Free Public Schools, which brought a lawsuit against the school district on grounds that the enterprise violated the constitutional separation between church and state. By 1962, the district agreed to discontinue the practice, ending the court battle and earning Texas Baptists a clear victory in the fight to oppose the merging of church and state.[30]

Valentine, along with E. S. James of the *Standard* and several others, became a hero of sorts to Baptists focused on church/state issues. His stance was unequivocal, and in the 1960s he laid the groundwork for what would become forty years of activism on the issue. "In those days there was a pretty strong consensus among Baptist people generally, but Baptist leaders particularly, that separation of church and state was the best guarantee of religious liberty," he later recalled. Referring to what would become a favored term of the Christian Right, he insisted that church/state separation was "not a 'shibboleth of doctrinaire secularism,' but was indeed a primary plank in the Baptist platform." As early as the 1960s, he was determined to oppose "people who were not historically rooted as Baptists who wanted government support for parochial schools."[31] To Valentine and other Texas Baptist leaders, such a position was the only possible Baptist response, given their denomination's history of supporting the separation of church and state. But their impulse to defend that separation would put them at direct odds with other Baptists who

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[30]Ibid, 209.
[31]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (May 22, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 5 (all quotations).

would soon join with leaders of the Christian Right to reshape American politics. The activism of Valentine, James, and other Texas Baptists during the 1960s established a pattern of political activity that put them on a collision course with other evangelicals. That split would not become completely evident until the late 1970s, but given the stridency with which Texas Baptists defended the separation of church and state during the 1960s, it was inevitable.

As the decade progressed, issues of church/state separation did more than cause friction between Catholics and Baptists; they also pitted Baptist against Baptist. While Texas Baptists, particularly the state's leadership, had a history of defending separation, the issue became contentious when the state government of Texas offered the possibility of financial support to private colleges through the Higher Education Facilities Act. The act offered low-interest loans to private colleges for the construction of new buildings, which would benefit large swaths of Texas college students. Aware of the coming crisis, the Baptist General Convention of Texas had commissioned a special committee to review the issues relating to federal funding of Baptist institutions and recommend guidelines. Led by Harold G. Basden, the committee also included Jimmy Allen, who remained an ardent advocate for strict church/state separation. The committee's findings were not especially surprising, given the pro-separation bent of the state's leadership. The group opposed "all direct aid" to Baptist institutions and specifically singled out low-interest government loans. Significantly, the committee allowed some exceptions, the most obvious of which involved the benefits of subsidized mail charges for non-profit organizations. That

exemption clearly benefited the *Baptist Standard*, whose editorial page consistently blasted any and all perceived breaches of church/state separation. Arguing that there was "no realistic way to approach the problem of adequately compensating the government" for postal fees, the committee termed such subsidies "a technical violation" and permitted them.[32] The report's authors were surely correct that, in contrast to other federal funding, postal subsidies presented pragmatic concerns that were seemingly impossible to avoid. But the report still irked Baptists who bristled at the exception for the *Standard*, particularly given the financial benefit that it provided the magazine at a time when other institutions were struggling financially.

Baylor University president Abner McCall pushed the issue again in 1965 in an issue of the *Baylor Line*, a magazine published by the University and sent to all Baylor alumni. In a special article, McCall argued that Baylor could accept federal or state funds for its projects without compromising Baptist beliefs about the separation of church and state. He did so by pointing to a distinction between religious liberty and the principle of separation. Religious liberty, he concluded, was of "supreme importance," while church/state separation was "a political devise" designed to defend religious liberty but that was not "indispensable to religious liberty."[33] He also chided members of the Basden committee for issuing a report that was based more on "intra-denominational politics than on principle."[34] He specifically attacked the exemption for mail services to the

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[32]Storey, 210.
[33]Abner McCall, "Baptist Institutions and Government Aid and Regulations," *Baylor Line*, reprinted in the *Baptist Standard*, May 26, 1985, 6.
[34]Ibid, 7.

Standard, calling it "by far the largest governmental subsidy taken by a Southern Baptist agency." Significantly, he painted Baptists who opposed taking federal funds as behind the times. "I have news for them: our institutions are already licensed and regulated by the government," he wrote.[35] To no one's surprise, E. S. James provided a quick response to McCall's charges. While admitting that his publication saved at least $100,000 a year by virtue of its status a nonprofit organization, he alleged that McCall overstated the level of savings to the *Standard*. He also went on record opposing the *Standard*'s acceptance of these funds, but maintained that it was the responsibility of the state convention to change the policy. In a clear shot at McCall, he sarcastically noted that the Baylor president was currently serving as president of the BGCT.[36]

In October 1965, McCall went even further in his arguments. He used his presidential address at the BGCT's annual meeting to press his views on the separation of church and state. In a clear attack on James, he concluded that all Baptist institutions should be so lucky as to enjoy government subsidies even while protesting against them. He listed numerous instances in which Baptists had technically violated their beliefs on church/state separation without endangering the broader (and, in his mind, more important) principle of religious liberty. To McCall, Baptists like James were too devout in their opposition to any entanglements with government agencies. But the state convention was not with McCall on these questions. In a powerful counter to his arguments, Baptist pastor Herbert Howard took to the convention floor to defend Baptists' concern about

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[35]Ibid, 8.
[36]E. S. James, "On the Recent Controversy," *Baptist Standard*, May 26, 1965, 4.

the separation of church and state. His statements could scarcely have been more direct: "We cannot, we dare not, we shall not forsake our Christian, our Baptist position, regardless of the consequences to our institutions."[37] James Dunn later recalled the division of Baptists, but reiterated that the leadership was mostly opposed to such grants. For his part, the funds represented "a violation of separation of church and state, a very serious compromise of the clarity of our witness." He also intoned, "How can you expect us to be true to separation of church and state?" if Texas Baptists also sought federal loans for their private schools. As Dunn noted, doing so would "make it more difficult all the time for us to oppose aid to parochial schools."[38] The TCLC also offered an official statement on the subject, insisting that "the preservation of our institutions through the use of tax money may increase the difficulty in preserving religious liberty through separation of church and state." Although the state convention took no official position on these matters in 1965, the 1966 convention came down on the side of James, the CLC, and others who defended the traditional Baptist opposition to accepting government funds for religious activities. At the same convention, Texas Baptists also reiterated the convention's support for the recommendations of the Basden Report.[39]

As usual, E. S. James was vigilant (some would say intransigent) in his defense of strict church/state separation. He was particularly frustrated by McCall's claim that the *Standard*'s editorials were hypocritical in light of special

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[37]Storey, 212.
[38]Dunn, James M. Oral Memoirs of James M. Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (September 23, 1980), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 138.
[39]See, *Baptist Standard*, November 3, 1965, 5.

postal rates that saved it a great deal of money. James was quick to note that he had argued against any special rate for his magazine due to its religious content. At the time, almost all publications paid a second-class rate, but religious papers received a different second-class rate that helped defray mailing costs. James insisted that his publication pay the same rate as secular papers, but the fifteen-member Board of Directors that governed the *Standard* "felt it would embarrass other religious papers that could not do that." In his dealings with McCall over the issue, James felt McCall overstated the significance of the subsidy, even after James had corresponded with him about his personal desire to do away with any subsidy at all. "I acknowledged in my correspondence . . . with McCall that there is a subsidy," he said. "Bless his big heart, he contended that we were receiving a tremendous subsidy, because he compared what we were paying for mailing a *Baptist Standard* with what it would cost if we paid first class rates. Well, of course that's an unreasonable comparison because no paper pays first class rates."[40]

Ultimately, James thought McCall used the issue unfairly to defend government subsidies to Baylor University, a decision James saw as a serious breach in the wall between church and state and a divergence from traditional Baptist teachings on the subject. James insisted that, "There is a subsidy there, nobody can deny, just like in any church paper that's sent out; but it doesn't compare with what the government proposes to do in grants to our institutions for

[40]James, E. S. Oral Memoirs of E. S. James. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (August 5, 1971), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 100 (all quotations).

equipment and for services."[41] The battle over government funds to Baptist colleges and universities provided yet another example that, when pressed, Texas Baptist leaders were willing to expend political capital to defend separation of church and state, even if it came at great cost to those institutions.

Of all the issues that captivated Baptists during the 1960s, none could match the passion generated by the Supreme Court's 1962 ruling on school prayer, *Engel vs. Vitale*. The 6-1 decision embraced the claims of plaintiffs that the reading of a 22 word official school prayer was unconstitutional and could not be allowed in public schools. The broad scope of the decision, which dubbed organized school prayer "an establishment of religion" forbidden by the First Amendment of the Constitution, was clear at the time of the ruling. A *New York Times* article noted that the decision would eventually outlaw such common practices as the reading of Bible verses in classrooms and chapel exercises, which were common across the country. The article also observed that the case probably represented "a stricter attitude in the Supreme Court towards breaches of what it has called the 'wall of separation' between church and state." Justice Hugo Black authored the decision and made its sweeping ramifications perfectly clear. "In this country, it is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite," he wrote. He also rejected the argument of the school district that allowing children of other religious traditions (or no religious tradition) to leave class during the prayers was sufficient protection. He argued that placing "the power, prestige and financial support of government" behind any religious practice inevitably results in some

[41]Ibid.

form of religious coercion by the government, a practice specifically forbidden by the First Amendment. That statement alone represented a massive shift in what the Court would allow, but Black went even further. He argued that the establishment clause "does not depend upon any showing of direct governmental compulsion and is violated by the enactment of laws which establish an official religion whether those laws operate directly to coerce nonobserving individuals or not." He added, "The prayer of each man's soul must be his and his alone. That is the genius of the First Amendment."[42]

By offering such a broad interpretation of the establishment clause, Black and his fellow justices made clear that the Court would not tolerate any form of organized religion in public schools. The impact of the decision was felt immediately, and it was certainly not lost on white southerners who had long complained that the federal government and its courts were growing too intrusive. The *New York Times* noted that the initial reaction in Congress was "dominated by unfavorable comment from southern members." In one of the most explicit condemnations, Representative George Andrews of Alabama complained, "They put the Negroes in school and now they've driven God out."[43] Not all southerners expressed their conviction with such blatant racism, but huge numbers of white southerners opposed the Supreme Court's ruling as an attack on their deepest values and an attempt by the federal courts to undermine them. The response of Texas Baptists to the issue demonstrated a different sensibility to issues of church/state separation. The reaction from these southern

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[42]Anthony Lewis, "Supreme Court Outlaws School Prayers in Regents Case Decision," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1962, Section A, 1 (all quotations).
[43]Ibid.

Protestants could not have been more different from George Andrews' feelings, and it helps explain why Texas Baptists ultimately rejected an alliance with leaders of the Christian Right.

Few scholars have written more extensively and gracefully about the rise of the Christian Right than sociologist William Martin. He argues that the Supreme Court's decision on school prayer was instrumental in creating the confrontational culture of the Christian Right and in spurring its members to political action. "Nothing, perhaps, generated more lasting resentment against the Supreme Court and stirred more concern among conservative Christians" than the 1962 prayer decision and the 1963 decision outlawing official Bible readings in public schools. Conservative believers, Martin notes, "viewed the decision as a declaration of war against Christianity, a conviction that has not diminished over time."[44] The Texas Baptist leadership generally welcomed the decision, in contrast to their southern Protestant counterparts. E. S. James insisted that God had "not been driven from the public school room by the U. S. Supreme Court." What the Court had done, in James' mind, was rule that "prescribed and controlled religion shall not be forced upon students by the power of government." The decision was "moral, fair, American, and best for the preservation and the progress of the nation."[45] When asked to join a crusade to enact "An Amendment for God," codifying the right to organized school prayer, he became even more explicit (and infuriating to his fellow southerners). "This country doesn't need an amendment for God," he replied. "God was not brought

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[44]Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 77.
[45]E. S. James, *Baptist Standard*, August 8, 1962, 2.

into American life by the adoption of the constitution, and His tenure here will not be determined by acts of Congress nor by ballots of the people."[46] The TCLC had condemned all official religious activity on public school grounds as early as 1958. Its leadership strongly supported the Supreme Court's decision, issuing a statement of support.[47]

At the time of the ruling, James Dunn was an instructor of religion and director of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) at West Texas State University. He was already rising to prominence in Texas Baptist circles, and he would later become the executive director of the TCLC. After the ruling, he shared the disdain of other Texas Baptist leaders for attempts to reverse the decision. He derided the "recurring attempts to pass a prayer amendment . . . to quote, 'put prayer back in the schools,' as if you loaded up a wheelbarrow with prayer and shoved it back into the schools." First as a BSU leader and later as leader of the TCLC, he "called upon Texas Baptists to recognize that the best thing government can do for religion is to leave it alone. And that was consistent with the church-state position we'd taken all along."[48] Foy Valentine was another important leader who agreed with the Supreme Court's ruling and struggled to understand why some Baptists viewed it as an assault on Christianity. After all, he was quick to note, "the majority of Texas Baptists and of Southern Baptists really supported the idea of separation of church and state. It was pretty much in

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[46] E. S. James, *Baptist Standard*, April 8, 1964, 2.
[47] Storey, 214.
[48] Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (December 12,1980), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 165 (both quotations).

our bloodstream."[49] At the time, leaders like James, Dunn, and Valentine could not have known how contentious issues of church/state separation would eventually become. They simply viewed their position as the logical extension of a Baptist tradition that was as dear to them as any other. But their support for the Court's decision placed them on the opposite side of a great political divide that would ultimately reshape southern politics and, by extension, U. S. politics. Although it would be another fifteen years before the Christian Right would formally organize under Jerry Falwell's leadership, these Texas Baptists drew a line in the sand on church/state issues that ensured they would never join other southern evangelicals in gravitating towards the Christian Right.

Although the Texas Baptist leadership was generally supportive of the ruling, opposition came from some quarters of state Baptists. In response to James' editorials lauding the opinion, one angry woman from Victoria, Texas, wrote to the *Standard* to express her disagreement. "We Baptists are trying so hard to keep church and state separate that we are literally joining the atheists," she wrote.[50] No doubt, many rank-in-file Texas Baptists shared her view, even if they rarely took on the leadership over the issue. Among the leadership, T. A. Patterson was the most notable critic of the Court's ruling, though he was certainly not as agitated over it as many southern believers. At the time, he served as executive secretary of the BGCT and wrote a regular column for the *Standard*. Although he and James had a mostly positive working relationship, Patterson later admitted that he felt some tension with James over occasional

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[49]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton and David Stricklin. (December 4, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 153-54.
[50]Storey, 213.

disagreements on issues like school prayer.[51] He worried that the Court's decision would lead to a "further paganization of American life" by giving atheists a major legal victory (he mostly ignored the fact that the suit had included only one family of non-believers and also included Jews and Unitarians). He predicted that in the end anti-religionists would use the ruling to "eliminate everything that pertains to religion" from public schools.[52] Given the wording of the ruling, that fear was probably not unwarranted, but James saw it in a much different light. He pointed out the important distinction between organized, official school prayers and private religious expression. In fact, the Court had focused its ruling only on official prayers, not private ones. To James, that distinction was crucial and meant that Texas Baptists had little reason to fear the decision.

The turbulence of the 1960s has been well documented by historians and other commentators. Most discussions about that decade focus on the changes in sexual norms, race relations, campus culture, and foreign policy that eventually provoked pushback from cultural conservatives. In most narratives of the Christian Right, the 1960s are significant because of the social changes that prompted conservative outrage and led finally to organizations like Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. But for Texas Baptists, especially leaders of the state convention, the 1960s were important years for entirely different reasons. During that decade, Texas Baptists solidified their commitment to the separation of church and state, placing them on a path that would eventually bring them into conflict with the

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[51]Patterson, T. A. Oral Memoirs of T. A. Patterson. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (April 29, 1975), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 197-200.
[52]T. A. Patterson, "Court Decision Brings Uncertainty," *The Baptist Standard*, September 26, 1962.

Christian Right. Issues like abortion rights and gay rights had not yet come to dominate southern politics, and few Baptists gave much public thought to whether those issues should be resolved through state action or private decisions. But the campaign of 1960, the debate over funding for parochial schools, the issue of school prayer, and the controversy surrounding potential government loans to Baptist institutions each provided an opportunity for Texas Baptists to moderate their strict views on church/state separation. On each occasion, they not only refused to concede ground but actually increased their determination to fight against breaches in the wall of separation. The 1970s and early 1980s would bring new battles to the forefront of Baptist life, particularly on issues of church and state. But Texas Baptists had already staked out a position on the side of strong support for church/state separation. They could not and would not abandon traditional Baptist understandings of the separation of church and state. To do so would be to forsake one of their proudest traditions. As the ensuing years ushered in great changes to southern politics, many observers were surprised to find Texas Baptists standing on the side opposite the Christian Right and, in many cases, an increasingly powerful Republican Party. But given the firm foundation Texas Baptists had already established on church/state issues, their actions made perfect sense. Their battle with the Christian Right during the 1970s and 1980s was based on deeply held beliefs, grounded in historic Baptist traditions, and consistent with the path Texas Baptists traveled long before the political and social changes of those years.

Chapter 2

Fighting the Winds of Change: Texas Baptists and the Separation of Church and State, 1970-1985

In 1980 Southern Baptists gathered in St. Louis for the denomination's annual meeting. The event took place in the shadow of the 1980 presidential election, which pitted incumbent Democrat (and staunch Southern Baptist) Jimmy Carter against Republican challenger Ronald Reagan. The meeting turned out to be one of the most controversial in Southern Baptist history, with messengers debating amendments on abortion, prayer in public schools, President Carter's White House Conference on the Family, and the tax status of businesses owned by churches. On each of these issues, disagreements about the separation of church and state and the proper relationship between religion and government lay at the heart of the debate. In the end, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) adopted an amendment strongly supporting an abortion ban, except in cases when the mother's life was in danger. The resolution represented a real triumph for convention conservatives and contradicted a 1976 resolution that had affirmed women's privacy rights and "the full range of medical services" in the abortion decision.[1] It also signified a serious shift on an important issue related to church/state separation. By affirming that a private, controversial decision was well within the purview of the federal government, Baptists seemed to reject an older consensus on the issue that opposed abortion on a religious level, but simultaneously sought to keep the issue out of the realm of government

[1]"Resolutions Chart New Course: SBC Hits Abortion, Asks Doctrinal Integrity," *The Baptist Standard*, June 18, 1980, 4.

activity.

The abortion reversal received by far the most media attention, but those who supported the traditional Baptist insistence on the separation of church and state won important victories on other issues. They fought back efforts to change the denomination's position on prayer in public schools, with the convention again recording its support for the 1963 Supreme Court decision outlawing organized prayer in public schools. The convention also supported removing the tax-exempt status for businesses owned by churches that compete in the private sector. The stance was evidence that, while times were clearly changing, Southern Baptists had not completely abandoned their previous commitments to the separation of church and state. Finally, the SBC gave a modest nod to one of its own, affirming President Carter's White House Conference on the Family, which had been the subject of criticism from conservatives for its inclusion of gays, lesbians and feminists.[2]

These victories by the pro-separation forces belie the popular narrative of the 1980 election and the rise of the Christian Right. In that narrative, 1980 was the turning point in evangelicals' shift from Democratic to Republican. On the surface, the point is difficult to dispute. As Bruce Nesmith has noted, Ronald Reagan's concerted strategy to woo evangelicals (including Southern Baptists) from the Democratic fold was largely successful. Evangelicals nationally, who numbered close to 45 million by 1976, had supported Carter in his first run for

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[2]Ibid.

president but switched to Reagan in 1980.[3] But for Texas Baptists, the issues that drew many evangelicals into the Republican camp were far from settled. That they and their allies could win support for pro-separation measures at the national convention is a testament to the influence they still held in 1980. Their success in pushing an SBC resolution supporting Jimmy Carter is further proof that even at the national level, Southern Baptists had not fully cemented their alliance with the Republican Party by 1980. The story of Texas Baptists in the 1970s and early 1980s helps explain why these issues remained unresolved for Southern Baptists. It also serves as a reminder to historians that southern evangelicals offered a far more complicated response to the rise of the Christian Right than scholars have previously assumed.

By the early 1970s, the Texas Baptist leadership had established clearly that the separation of church and state was a non-negotiable issue for them. As the decade progressed and conservative evangelicals became more politically organized, Texas Baptists reiterated their defense of church/state separation, sometimes in provocative and unexpected ways. The funding of secondary and higher education remained a contentious issue for them as the 1970s began. In the spring of 1971, the Texas legislature passed a bill providing for government-funded assistance to students attending private colleges. The general idea was that, even with the assistance, those students would pay much more for college than their counterparts in state schools. Also, since the money was directed towards individuals, not religious institutions themselves, even some Baptists

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[3]James Nesmith, *The New Republican Coalition: The Reagan Campaign and White Evangelicals* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 59-63.

concluded that it would not stir controversy. But once again E. S. James of the *Baptist Standard* came down strongly on the side of strict separation. He called the bill "bad legislation," insisting that, "We ought to do everything we can to keep church and state separate." Going further, he intoned, "I'm unwilling to be taxed, and I won't do it quietly to support any religion . . . I wouldn't think of being willing to be taxed to support a Baptist church."[4] His statements made clear again how devoted he was to strict separation. James knew full well that the legislation would benefit many Baptists students who wanted to attend Baylor University or other Baptist colleges but could not afford the steep tuition prices. His statements opposing taxpayer funding of Baptist activities were geared directly to that issue. In short, his stance against public funding of private religion was not limited to Catholic schools; his opposition was just as strident when it was Southern Baptist students who stood to benefit.

Although James focused on funding to individual students, the larger focus of Texas Baptists in the early 1970s was state aid to private secondary and elementary schools. A lingering bill in the state legislature would have provided up to $50 million of aid to those schools by funding non-religious activities, such as the hiring of teachers to provide instruction in secular subjects, the purchase of books, and transportation costs. The Baptist General Convention of Texas adopted an official stance against such funding at its annual meeting in Austin in 1970. The proclamation was unequivocal: "Baptists are committed to religious liberty and its corollary separation of church and state, a strong public school

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[4]James, E. S. Oral Memoirs of E. S. James. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (August 5, 1971), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 110.

system, and racial justice. We call on Texas Baptists to support the expenditure of public funds for only public schools through public channels." With that statement of support from the state convention, the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC) went to work opposing the bill and encouraging Texas Baptists to contact their representatives with their concerns. In a TCLC report that was widely distributed in Baptist churches, associate director Phil Strickland outlined the primary reasons for his organization's opposition to the bill. First, the bill would ultimately draw funding away from public schools. "The education tax dollar will stretch only so far," he argued. "The public is committed by tradition, constitution, frequent vote, and legislation to support public schools. It has no obligation to support private schools." But Strickland did not limit his concern to the issue of funding; he went further, arguing that the proposed funding would exacerbate the existing problem of educational inequality. "Texas would move towards government sponsorship of two separate educational systems," he wrote. "This would guarantee inequality in opportunity." Finally, he invoked the Texas Constitution, noting that it prohibited "direct or indirect" tax aid to churches. "No matter how carefully drawn, this legislation would violate that prohibition," he wrote. With the support of the state convention, the TCLC acted to make Texas Baptists a central political player in the battle over state funding of private schools.[5]

In April 1971 the state legislature debated the bill, sponsored by Representative Raul Longoria of Edinburg. The most controversial aspect of the

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[5]"Allen Leads Opposition; Texas Parochial Aid Debated," *Baptist Standard*, May 12, 1971, 3 (all quotations).

bill was its promise to pay up to three-fourths of the salaries of private school teachers who taught subjects not related to religious instruction. Jimmy Allen of the TCLC led the fight against the bill, gathering opponents from a diversity of backgrounds to testify against the bill before the state legislature. Supporters of the bill insisted that the $17.5 million it would spend to pay private school teachers would ultimately save the state money. If all the students in private schools entered public schools, the estimated cost to the state would have been $75 million. Of course, supporters ignored the obvious fact that the vast majority of students in private schools would stay there regardless of whether their teachers received a salary from the state or from private funding. But supporters of the bill filled the chamber with what Allen estimated was an 80/20 split in favor of the bill. Despite that show of support, Allen's effort against the bill was organized and focused. Among the prominent figures he brought to testify against the bill were members of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (of which Allen was the current president), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Anti-Defamation League. He also brought in clergy to testify against the bill; they ranged from Episcopal to Baptist to Seventh Day Adventist and Church of Christ. James Wood of the Institute for Church-State Studies at Baylor also testified against the bill, another indication of how united Texas Baptists were in opposing the measure.[6]

Allen was unequivocal in his stance: "Any attempt to aid parochial schools from tax money is patently unconstitutional under the Texas Constitution." He

[6]Ibid.

continued, "It is unwise, as far as public education is concerned, and is unthinkable as a violation of the free religious conscience."[7] E. S. James joined the chorus of those opposing the bill. He emphasized what he believed were misleading arguments by supporters, saying they "cloud the issue with their cry about double taxation--- taxes for public schools while having to pay tuition for their children in parochial schools." He reminded them that "there is no compulsion in the latter" and accused them of ignoring "the double taxation which will come our way if we have to support both church and public schools."[8] In working against public funding for private schools, Allen and James reiterated the Texas Baptist position of strong church/state separation. At the time, the Christian Right had not formally organized, much less developed its ideology on issues of church and state. But Texas Baptists' position on school funding was an early indication that their basic assumptions would conflict with the Christian Right, whose leaders supported government funding of private schools from the movement's earliest days.

One of the central reasons Texas Baptists opposed government funding of public schools was that they believed it to be an unconstitutional violation of the separation of church and state. In the summer of 1971 the Supreme Court vindicated their concerns. In an 8 to 1 decision, the Court ruled that state programs that reimburse private religious schools for instruction in secular subjects were a violation of the separation of church and state and constituted "excessive entanglement between government and religion." The ruling was in

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[7]Ibid.
[8]"Disaster in Austin," *Baptist Standard*, May 19, 1971, 6.

response to state programs in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, which plaintiffs claimed were in violation of church/state separation; it was the first time the Court had struck down government aid to parochial or other private schools. The Court ruled specifically on direct aid to teachers who teach at private schools, but the spirit of the ruling seemed to call into question other forms of aid, like the purchase of textbooks and transportation for students at private schools. By 1971, thirty-six of fifty states had adopted some form of aid to religious schools, much to the chagrin of Texas Baptists and other advocates for church/state separation. But in a separate 5-4 ruling, the Court upheld the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, which provided funds for the construction of new facilities at private colleges and universities. Interestingly, in issuing the majority opinion, Chief Justice Warren Burger noted that elementary and secondary schools were more involved in religious indoctrination than colleges. He also argued that "there is substance to the conclusion that college students are less impressionable and less susceptible to religious indoctrination" than their counterparts at elementary and secondary schools. He also insisted that a one-time grant for academic facilities involved much less "entanglement" between church and state than the funding of teachers over long periods of time, particularly given that the bill providing funding for facilities barred the use of these buildings for religious purposes.[9] In general, though, the Court's rulings provided little solace to advocates of government funding of private schools. The Court made it abundantly clear that, with very few exceptions, the principle of church/state

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[9]Fred P. Grahams, "High Court, 8 to 1, Forbids States to Reimburse Parochial Schools; Backs College Level Help 5 to 4," *New York Times*, June 29, 1971, Section A, 1.

separation was more important than the monetary needs of private schools. In authoring the decision on funding for teacher pay, Justice Burger wrote, "The Constitution decrees that religion must be a private matter for the individual, the family and the institutions of private choice, and that while involvement and entanglement is inevitable, lines must be drawn."[10]

Not surprisingly, Texas Baptist leaders celebrated the Court's ruling. The *Standard* ran an editorial lauding the decision, saying it "should give major encouragement to those determined to keep church hands out of the public treasury." It hailed Justice Burger's insistence that taxpayer funding of private schools would inevitably "entail political activity," calling his comment "the understatement of the year."[11] But the editorial was mostly negative, voicing its disagreement with the decision on the Higher Education Facilities Act and citing the decision as a call to action by Baptists who supported the separation of church and state. E. S. James correctly noted that the ruling avoided the issue of public grants to private elementary schools for buildings.[12] While the Court seemed more concerned with entanglement between the state and elementary or secondary schools, it also seemed to indicate that funding for facilities was less of a threat to church/state separation than funding of teacher's salaries. Of course, each of these decisions was arbitrary, and James worried that advocates of school vouchers (Catholics in particular) would continue to push for government funding of private schools.

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[10]John Novotney, "Court Rules Aid Unconstitutional," *Religious News Service*, reprinted in the *Baptist Standard*, July 7, 1971, 3.
[11]"Editorial: Route of the Tax," *Baptist Standard*, July 7, 1971, 4.
[12] Ibid.

James pointedly asked, "Will the voucher plan for schools and colleges be upheld? If not for both, will the Court differentiate between the voucher system for parochial schools and colleges as it did between college buildings and parochial teacher salaries?" He worried that, in the meantime, states would move to further fund parochial and other private schools, at the expense of taxpayers who did not share the religious beliefs of those schools. James was characteristically unequivocal in his message to Texas Baptists: "The call now is to gird for battle, both in the legislative halls and the courts, to strike down the efforts of those who want a voucher system to support the church schools. It is still tax money, whether it goes directly to the teacher or through the pupil to the teacher." Going further, he intoned that "Tax-subsidized churches are dead churches, and should be dead. No taxpayer wants to be robbed for teaching something he does not believe."[13] Later in the decade, a nascent Christian Right movement would elevate the issue of school vouchers to a place of prominence on its national agenda. Leaders like Jerry Falwell argued that the "expulsion of Almighty God from the public schools" necessitated a shift to private education, and that government funding of those schools was not only appropriate but desirable.[14] The reaction of *Standard* editors to the Court's 1971 ruling was one of many early indications that Texas Baptists would follow a different course. Not only were their religious beliefs incompatible with school vouchers, but they saw them as an affront to the separation of church and state, one of their most cherished ethical traditions.

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[13]Ibid.
[14]Herbert H. Denton and Marjorie Hyer, "President to Ask Hill for Prayer Amendment," *The Washington Post*, Final Edition, 7 May 1982, Section A, 1.

By the summer of 1971, Texas Baptists were fighting off another challenge: a proposed "prayer amendment" in the U. S. House of Representatives that was being pushed by conservative groups. The amendment was designed as a response to the Supreme Court's 1963 decision banning organized school prayer. Its supporters believed that it was a necessary supplement to the First Amendment's statements on religion and free speech, given the Court's ruling. The amendment simply read, "Nothing contained in this Constitution shall abridge the rights of persons lawfully assembled, in any public building which is supported in whole or in part through the expenditure of public funds, to participate in nondenominational prayer."[15] According to proponents, the amendment would effectively prevent the Supreme Court from banning organized prayer and Bible reading in public schools, but opponents noted that religious groups had rarely been able to agree on what a "nondenominational" prayer was. Supporters worked tirelessly throughout the summer to gain the 218 sponsors that would force the issue to a vote on the House floor, bypassing the Judiciary Committee, whose members had blocked the amendment from a floor vote for months.[16] The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the political advocacy arm of the national convention, had warned repeatedly that the amendment would fundamentally alter the First Amendment and help crumble the wall of separation between church and state. The Southern Baptist Convention had passed resolutions affirming their support for the First

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[15]Beth Hayworth, "Baptist Opposition Cited: Supporters Try Again for Prayer Amendment Passage," *Baptist Press*, reprinted in the *Baptist Standard*, July 28, 1971, 11.
[16]Marjorie Hunter, "School Prayer Vote is Forced in House," *New York Times*, September 22, 1971, Section A, 1.

Amendment and in opposition to any changes that could affect its meaning. In 1964 and 1971, Southern Baptists passed resolutions opposing any changes to the First Amendment, and Texas Baptists were strongly supportive of that position. The Texas Christian Life Commission sent letters opposing the prayer amendment to every U. S. representative in Texas, and they included with these letters copies of both the 1964 and 1971 Southern Baptist resolutions.[17] Their harmony with the national convention on church/state issues might surprise contemporary readers, but in the early 1970s fundamentalist Baptists had not yet taken control of the national convention.

The *Baptist Standard* was adamant in its opposition to the amendment. A pointed editorial claimed that while the bill "appears harmless at first glance, it raises far more questions than it answers."[18] Supporters of the bill were vague about what exactly the bill would do; after all, allowing non-denominational prayer could mean different things in different schools. But the editors of the *Standard* were certain that whatever its various effects, the results would be nefarious: "We think the proposed amendment will permit government-ordered prayers. Such eliminates voluntarism which is basic to our understandings of prayer. Such becomes a ritual and is without meaning to God or man."[19] The editors were especially concerned that the phrase "non-denominational" necessarily would include faiths far outside the Protestant tradition. "What about our Jewish friends? Are we to ignore the Moslem and the Hindu? Satisfy all these with the

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[17]Hayworth, 11.
[18]Editorials: Guard the Amendment," *Baptist Standard*, August 25, 1971, 6.
[19]Ibid.

'nondenominational' and we have an idea that God would rather be ignored."[20] More than even these concerns, the editors expressed a reverence for the First Amendment and a concern that tampering with it would undermine religious freedom and the separation of church and state. They insisted that, "Anything that has stood so well the test of time should have proven itself in almost 200 years." After laying out their various complaints, the editors warned ominously that, "Tampering with the First Amendment could be far more dangerous than we would like to imagine."[21]

By the 1980s, the cause of organized prayer in public schools would become a rallying point for religious conservatives. The distinction between organized prayer and voluntary prayer was often lost as conservative Christians spoke of a government attempt to "ban God" from the public sphere. But for Texas Baptists, this distinction was crucial to their opposition to a prayer amendment. A resolution of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs insisted, "At no time has the Supreme Court prohibited voluntary prayer but has only ruled against governmentally prescribed prayer." Going further, a representative of the organization stated, "We ought to be applauding the Supreme Court in these cases. We ought to hang our heads in shame that an agnostic took this issue to the Supreme Court when we Baptists should have."[22]

For contemporary readers, conditioned to associate Southern Baptists with the Christian Right, statements like the previous ones might seem strange. Indeed, it would be easy to conclude that Texas Baptists must have been a clear

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[20]Ibid.
[21]Ibid.
[22]"Committee Opposes Amendment," *Baptist Standard*, September 13, 1971, 3.

minority within the larger convention. But to truly understand how southern religious life changed during the 1970s and 1980s, historians must contend with a singular fact: On issues like the prayer amendment, Texas Baptists were in line with the national convention. Carl Bates, who served as president of the SBC in 1971, was robust in his opposition to the amendment. "We see not only separation of church and state being attacked," he wrote, "but we see the free exercise of religion itself about to be breached." Referring to the proposed amendment as "one of the most insidious developments against freedom and true religion that I have seen," he argued that, "Real prayer and genuine New Testament religion have nothing to gain and all to lose if this amendment becomes a part of the Constitution." Besides his strident opposition to the amendment, he also defended the Supreme Court's decision, which was under attack from elements of the burgeoning movement of conservative evangelicals: "It is my deliberate opinion that the Supreme Court gave voluntary religion a tremendous boost by removing governmental authority from the devotional life of school children."[23] His statements were an indication that, at least in the early 1970s, Texas Baptists' support for church/state separation was completely consistent with the mainstream of Baptist thought. They were simply echoing a common Baptist concern about breaches in church/state separation; such concerns had been a dominant feature of Baptist politics from the denomination's earliest days. But Texas Baptists would soon learn that the separation of church and state was of little concern to the emerging group of Christian activists that eventually became known as the Christian Right.

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[23]"Not Vote Against God: Prayer Bill Defeat Urged," *Baptist Standard*, September 27, 1971, 19.

In the 1970s and 1980s, other evangelicals would conclude that religious liberty could coexist with a strong affirmation of religion by the state. Indeed, they would eventually argue that for such liberty to thrive, the state must be proactive in promoting private religion.[24] But in the early 1970s, Texas Baptists saw the issue much differently, and their reaction to the prayer amendment helps explain why they ultimately parted company with members of the Christian Right. One *Standard* issue warned that supporters of the amendment were no friends to the cause of religious freedom: "They are those who make it appear that the steadfast friends of the First Amendment are against God, country, and motherhood, but such an impression is a deception and a delusion."[25] The portrayal of political opponents as godless and unpatriotic would become a hallmark of Christian Right politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and such attacks are now standard course in campaigns against secular adversaries. But Texas Baptists experienced such tactics long before the formation of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority in 1979 or Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign. The interesting aspect of such attacks is that the charge of godlessness seemed especially absurd, coming as it did against a group of Christians who spent most of their time on church work. Despite the attacks, Baptist leaders in Texas were steadfast in their support for church/state separation and their opposition to the proposed amendment. One editorial was typical: "The truest friends of religion and the most constructive citizens of the state are those who support the First

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[24]For more on the Christian Right and church/state separation, see James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991), 260-271; and Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 105-109.

[25]"Baptists Warn Against Amendment," *Baptist Standard*, August 4, 1971, 3.

Amendment guarantees that have made possible in the United States a fuller measure of religious freedom than was previously known in the world."[26] Although such arguments were perfectly in keeping with Baptist tradition, they would become more conspicuous among Southern Baptists as time wore on. But the power of those sentiments, at least for Texas Baptists, was enough to prevent an alliance with leaders of the Religious Right in the 1970s and beyond.

The commitment of Texas Baptists to the separation of church and state led them to focus heavily on the presidential election of 1972. That contest is most often remembered for the sharp policy differences between liberal Democrat George McGovern and conservative Republican incumbent Richard Nixon.[27] But Texas Baptists found that on the subject of federal aid to private schools, the candidates were both in agreement and very misguided. Before McGovern was even a serious contender, the *Standard* took Nixon to task for his proposals to provide federal funding to non-public schools. In November 1971, Nixon's administration convened a summit of educational leaders from public and private schools. On the agenda was a proposal to find ways to get public money to private religious schools without bringing up constitutional questions.[28] His reasons for doing so may have been sincere, but there was also a clear political dimension to his action. The vast majority of the private schools at the conference were parochial schools, run by the Catholic Church. Having been

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[26]Ibid.

[27]For further reading on the 1972 presidential election, please see Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: De Capo, 2002).

[28]"Administration Pushed Parochiaid: Education Office Seeks Ways to Further Tax Flow to Church Schools," *Baptist Standard*, December 6, 1971, 5.

John Kennedy's opponent in 1960, Nixon had a somewhat troubled relationship with Catholic voters. But they were a large and important constituency, and their support could make or break a candidate. But while Nixon was courting Catholics, he was alienating Baptists. John W. Baker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, issued a statement decrying Nixon's "drive to provide support for the nation's parochial schools from the public treasury."[29] The conference was only the beginning of a protracted struggle between Texas Baptists and the president of the United States over the issue. While McGovern would eventually draw their ire for half-heartedly agreeing to public support for private schools, it was Nixon's push for such funding that garnered the most criticism from Texas Baptists during the presidential election.

In the spring of 1972, a White House-appointed panel issued a report advocating an increase in federal funding to private schools. The recommendations included tax credits for parents of children in church schools, a federal construction-loan program, and tuition reimbursements. The report recognized court rulings that direct aid to schools was unconstitutional but argued that indirect methods would "pass judicial muster." Texas Baptist leaders were furious about the decision and ran an editorial in the *Standard* claiming that the committee was biased by Nixon's appointment of Catholic educators to serve on it. "It is amazing," the editorial complained, "that this committee, carrying a White House stamp of approval, could be so stacked on an issue this controversial." Concluding that the president was "irrevocably committed" to pursuing federal funding of private schools, the editorial board called on Texas

[29]Ibid.

Baptists to flood the White House with complaints that its course of action would breach the wall of separation between church and state.[30]

As the 1972 race got underway, the Ways and Means committee in the House of Representatives voted 18 to 6 in favor of the very type of plan that Texas Baptists so stridently opposed. The plan offered parents of children in private schools up to 50 percent of tuition, to a maximum of $200 per month. The credits came in the form of a tax deduction, allowing such families to gain up to $2,400 per year, per child from the federal government, simply for enrolling a student in a private school. The estimated cost to the government, according to the committee's recommendations, was between $300 and $400 million a year, though critics of the legislation maintained the number would end up closer to $1 billion. Although the bill easily made it out of committee, congressional leaders emphasized that the bill was not a priority during the election year. The bill was in keeping with the proposals of the Nixon administration, and Democrat George McGovern had already offered support for similar measures.[31]

The reaction of Texas Baptists was swift and decisive. James Dunn, executive director of the TCLC, called the proposal "a perversion of the basic purpose for taxation and a serious threat to religious liberty." Going further, he labeled the bill "a blatant attempt to make millions of middle Americans pay the bills for private and parochial schools operated by those with vast wealth."[32] Another Texas Baptist, James Wood, echoed Dunn's comments. Wood, a former Baylor professor who served as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee

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[30]"Editorials: Stacked for Parochiad," *Baptist Standard*, May 3, 1972, 6 (all quotations).
[31]"Debates on Religious Liberty Enter Presidential Race," *New York Times*, April 10, 1972, A7.
[32]"Threat to Religious Liberty: Baptists Protest Credits," *Baptist Standard*, May 3, 1972, 5.

on Public Affairs (BJCPA), used his speech at the organization's semiannual meeting to argue against the credits. He insisted that the church should not be "bound to the power structure of this world" and made the case for consistent action to protect the separation of church and state. At the same meeting, the BJCPA formally adopted a resolution protesting the tax credits. "Baptists have traditionally considered the use of public funds for religious education to be coerced participation in a religious program," the document noted.[33]

During the presidential campaign, Texas Baptists mostly focused on criticizing Nixon, whose advocacy for school vouchers was by far more ardent than George McGovern's. But McGovern also drew the ire of Texas Baptists when he proposed a plan that was almost identical to Nixon's.[34] As Nixon and McGovern fought for votes in the fall of 1972, the *Baptist Standard* ran an editorial blasting both candidates: "President Nixon, Senator McGovern and other political persons refuse to read the First Amendment. Their similar positions prevent any voter choice on this issue as to the President but that does not deny a voice to those who believe in separation of church and state."[35]

Although Texas Baptists were frustrated that neither presidential candidate would fight federal funding of public schools, they received welcome news from the courts. In another eight to one decision, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling of a lower appeals court to overturn an Ohio law providing state funds to private schools. The 1971 law provided $90 per year to 300,000 families for reimbursement of expenses relating to private secondary education. About 95

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[33]Ibid.
[34]"Separation Stands," *Baptist Standard*, October 18, 1972, 6.
[35]Ibid.

percent of the parents were Catholic, so the law clearly favored one religious group. Members of the Supreme Court were so confident of their ruling that they made it without hearing any new oral arguments. Noting that it had ruled on a similar issue with the 1971 case, the Court ruled that the law was in violation of the First Amendment's prohibition on government aid to organized religion. The proposal by the House Ways and Means committee, supported by both presidential candidates, was very much along the same lines, giving hope to opponents that it would eventually be ruled unconstitutional. As with many church/state issues, the best recourse for opponents of federal aid to private schools was the court system, and Texas Baptists recognized as much.[36]

The editorial board of the *Baptist Standard* actually encouraged rank and file Baptists to contact Americans United for Separation of Church and State and thank the organization for its legal efforts to protect church/state separation. By the 1980s, that organization would become a primary target of conservative Christian activists who viewed it as promoting secularism and persecuting people of faith. But in the 1970s, the country's largest Baptist state convention frequently allied with the group. Following the Supreme Court's decision on the Ohio law, the *Standard* called it "the David which has repeatedly slain Goliath" and instructed readers to "shout your praise for Americans United for Separation of Church and State."[37] This reaction is another demonstration of the fact that Baptists were not initially receptive to Christian Right claims about the separation of church and state. Not only did Texas Baptists view them with suspicion, but

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

they fought hard on the other side of the issue.

On other political issues, Texas Baptists demonstrated a profoundly different understanding of government than did their adversaries on the Christian Right. One important example was Texas Baptists' response to the proposed Child and Family Services Act, a contentious issue during the 1976 presidential election. The bill offered to families (on a voluntary basis) certain health, child care, and education services. Some conservative critics charged that the bill would "take the responsibility for children away from parents and give it to the government" and even "duplicate the Soviet-style system of communal child-rearing." As a result of a flyer campaign by conservative church leaders across the country, the bill's sponsor, Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota, received between 500 and 600 letters a day from opponents of the bill.[38] This organizational effort by church leaders was an early indication that conservative Christians were moving in the direction of right-wing political agitation.

In Texas, Baptist leaders did not join their counterparts in advocating against the bill's passage. In a stinging editorial, the *Standard* called the protests "worthless" and based on "misinformation." The editorial included comments from an interview with Mondale and expressed support for his position. It also articulated a viewpoint on the relationship between religion and politics that was quite different from the one shared by opponents of the bill. In a rebuke of "extremist groups" and "those who pose as religious conservatives," the article admonished political agitators to stop "quoting the *Congressional Record* as an

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[38]"A Ranting Mail Campaign," *The Washington Post*, Final Edition, 19 February 1976, Section A, 18.

authority equal to the King James Version. It is not."[39] The debate over the act was an early demonstration of the split between Texas Baptists and the growing movement of politically active Christian conservatives. Not only were Texas Baptists adamant in their defense of church/state separation, but they were also not ideologically oriented towards conservative politics. One reason behind this reluctance to ally with the Christian Right was a deep concern that politics would gain a place of equal importance to religion in Baptist life. While other Baptists moved in a political direction, Texas Baptists remained committed to evangelism and missions as the most important religious duties. By 1975, Texas Baptists funded specific commissions for state evangelism and Christian education and provided very generous funding for the Home Mission Board of the national denomination. A significant portion of the budget also supported Sunday school curriculum, children's homes, and charity hospitals.[40] For the Texas Baptist leadership, these issues were central. After 1975, they would show significant resistance to the national denominational leadership's shift towards a more political orientation.

Other editorials in the mid- to late 1970s indicate a special concern that Baptists not place a political agenda ahead of the religious goal of evangelism that was the principle mission of Texas Baptists. One such editorial warned against those "organizations which trumpet a 'Christian republic,' are out to 'save America,' and in other ways headline morality in government." The article

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[39]"Editorial: Get the Facts," *The Baptist Standard*, 17 March 1976, 6 (all quotations).
[40]For more information on the budgets and emphases of Texas Baptists before and after 1975, see Joseph E. Early, *A Texas Baptist History Sourcebook: A Companion to Mcbeth's Texas Baptists* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), 403-435.

advocated against involvement with "topics which belong exclusively in the political arena."[41] Although the editorial did not state what those issues were, it did attack the Christian Freedom Foundation, an organization founded in the 1950s to promote what its leaders termed "a Christian vision for economics."[42] The *Standard* argued against "dragging the name 'Christian' along with a platform on right-to-work laws, the minimum wage, the gold standard and similar issues." The editorial was a crucial moment in defining the stark contrast between Texas Baptists and Christian Right activists. In it, the editorial board articulated a belief in avoiding political alliances that could damage the evangelistic message of Baptists. It argued against "those who would wed the concept of Christian morality to . . . a certain political philosophy and thus prostitute morality for political goals." In their rejection of a partnership with any political party, the editors were unambiguous: "We want no part of a 'Christian Party' . . . Those quick to mix Christianity with the purely political are doing a disservice to the religious."[43] As early as the mid-1970s, Texas Baptist leaders positioned themselves in opposition to the Christian Right. As religious conservatives grew in power, Texas Baptists only increased their determination not to follow them into the Republican Party establishment.

The issue of school prayer provided a perfect example of the differing political philosophies of Texas Baptists and supporters of the Christian Right. By 1980 school prayer was a centerpiece of the Christian Right agenda, bringing the

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[41]"Editorial: Guard Against Christian-Political Organizations," *The Baptist Standard*, 4 August 1976, 6 (all quotations).
[42]Gary Wills, "Born-Again Politics," *The New York Times*, Final Edition, 1 August 1976, Section A, 59.
[43]"Editorial: Guard Against Christian-Political Organizations," *The Baptist Standard*, 4 August 1976, 6 (all quotations).

movement into conflict with the Texas Baptist emphasis on church-state separation. Members of the national media observed with interest a significant change in the 1980 Republican Party Platform, which endorsed the cause of restoring organized prayer to public schools.[44] Observers noted that on the issue of school prayer and several others, religious conservatives influenced the Republican Platform in significant ways.[45] As religious conservatives gained national prominence and brought the issue of school prayer to the forefront of national debate, Texas Baptists continued to oppose organized school prayer on grounds of church-state separation. That position was consistent with resolutions adopted by the national convention in 1964 and 1971, both of which endorsed the Supreme Court's decision outlawing government-sponsored prayer in public schools. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a Southern Baptist politician with a very different view pressed for a constitutional amendment circumventing the Supreme Court's ruling on organized school prayer. Jesse Helms, a conservative North Carolina senator and an ally of both Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, advocated an amendment that would leave the issue of school prayer to the states, effectively allowing states to condone organized prayer if they wished to do so.[46]

In response to Helms's activities and the growing power of the Christian

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[44]*The Republican Party Platform of 1980, Adopted by the Republican National Convention, July 15, 1980, Detroit, Michigan*, in possession of the author. Also available at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25844.

[45]For examples of national coverage of the influence of religious conservatives on the 1980 Republican Platform, see "Editorial: The Social Issues," *The Wall Street Journal*, Final Edition, 13 October 1980, Section A, 18; Irving Kristol, "The New Republican Party," *The Wall Street Journal*, Final Edition, 17 July 1980, Section A, 20; Richard L. Strout, "Platform: GOP, Democrats March to Different Drummers," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 August 1980, 5.

[46]Stan Hastey, "Debate Swirls Around Helms' 'Prayer Moves,'" *The Baptist Standard*, 23 April 1980, 17.

Right, Texas Baptists articulated an alternative Baptist position on the issue: "There is no place in American life for prayers formulated and regulated by the government."[47] By 1980 Baptist fundamentalists had succeeded in electing a Falwell-supported candidate as president of the SBC (see chapter 3). For the first time, Texas Baptists found themselves at odds with the national convention, and school prayer was one of the most compelling issues on which the two camps disagreed. In an editorial outlining their position, Texas Baptist leaders criticized SBC president Adrien Rogers for supporting Helms's amendment and argued that such a position was inconsistent with traditional Baptist principles. Noting that from the earliest moments of American government, Baptists had been staunch supporters of church-state separation, the article warned that Southern Baptists were losing their position as "a strong voice for religious freedom." Significantly, Texas Baptists countered the argument by religious conservatives that children were not allowed to pray in schools: "No student or teacher has ever been forbidden to pray privately in the public schools." The editorial quoted E. S. James, who argued that "No Baptists anywhere" should "give support to any movement designed to weaken the guarantee of religious liberty for everyone . . . we have no right to insist that our views be forced upon those who don't want them."[48] The issue of school prayer provided a powerful demonstration that by the early 1980s, Texas Baptists and the Christian Right held vastly different views about the proper relationship between religion and government. While the

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[47]"Editorial: Public School Prayer and Religious Liberty," *The Baptist Standard*, 20 February 1980, 6.

[48]Editorial: Guard Against Christian-Political Organizations," *The Baptist Standard*, 4 August 1976, 6.

Christian Right moved further away from the principle of church-state separation, Texas Baptists defended it tenaciously.

Foy Valentine was one of the fiercest Baptists advocates for the separation of church and state, a position that increasingly put him at odds with the national convention. Valentine served as director of the TCLC from 1953-1960, and he directed the national Christian Life Commission (CLC) during the 1960s and early 1970s. He had been involved in opposing government aid to parochial schools in the 1950s and 1960s, and the movement against such funding had a profound effect on his thinking. He became increasingly vocal about the need for Baptists to embrace their history of strong support for church/state separation.[49] He recalls the move towards de-emphasizing that tradition with sadness: "Our Baptist leadership began to sound like Roman Catholic leaders had been sounding for decades: Look, we've gotta have government money--tax money-- in order to do our great work for God."[50] But under the leadership and advice of Valentine, James Dunn, and others, Texas Baptists preserved the emphasis on church/state separation that had been distinctive of American Baptists from their earliest days. The TCLC distributed literature on the topic and openly identified Americans United for Separation of Church and State as an ally on the issue. Later, Valentine went so far as to serve on the board of directors for that organization.[51] Valentine mostly lost his battles with fundamentalists in the national convention, but his ideals continued to guide

[49]Storey, 209-210. Storey's book provides a fuller treatment of Valentine's work on the CLC and his influence on Baptist politics during the 1960s and 1970s.
[50]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 18 November 1976), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 128.
[51]Ibid., 129.

the Baptist General Convention of Texas, where church/state separation remained a central emphasis. His leadership on those issues ensured that Texas Baptists would hold to their commitment to church/state separation and avoid entanglement with the Christian Right.

After 1980, the conservative faction gained increasing institutional control over the SBC, mainly due to the president's ability to appoint members of various committees.[52] During the early years of the 1980s, Texas Baptists remained committed to opposing the fundamentalist cause, particularly on national political issues. In a stinging 1982 editorial, a leading Texas Baptist pastor offered a robust critique of the SBC alliance with religious conservative leaders and defended the separation of church and state. He warned that Baptists were in danger of abandoning their religious heritage: "Until now, Southern Baptists have been leaders as advocates of religious liberty and separation of church and state." He admonished Texas Baptists to "ensure that religious liberty is neither restricted nor denied to any. It is the Baptist way."[53] The article was yet another demonstration that the issue of church/state separation was the ultimate dividing line between Texas Baptists and the Christian Right.

The first presidential term of Ronald Reagan, 1981 to 1985, was a time of increasing cooperation between religious conservatives and the Republican Party.[54] While the national SBC and other evangelicals moved closer to the Reagan administration, Texas Baptists continued their stance of strong support

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[52]Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 4-6.
[53]"Editorial: Southern Baptists Need History Lesson," *The Baptist Standard*, 30 June 1982, 6.
[54]For a more detailed analysis of the Christian Right during the Reagan years, see William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996).

for the separation of church and state. The reaction to Reagan's proposal for a constitutional amendment allowing organized prayer in public schools highlighted the stark differences between the ideology of Texas Baptists and that of the denomination's leadership. While addressing a group of prominent ministers at the White House, Reagan revealed his intention to push for the amendment, calling for an awakening "of America's religious and moral heart." His comments were cause for celebration among members of the Christian Right. Jerry Falwell pledged to dedicate "every resource" of the Moral Majority to the bill's passage and stated, "I think it's a bright day in America . . . After twenty years of expulsion of Almighty God from the public schools, I think this is the light at the end of the tunnel."[55]

The reaction of Texas Baptists was not nearly as joyful. On the heels of Reagan's declaration, Southern Baptists held their annual convention in New Orleans. A report by *Baptist Press*, the national newsmagazine for Southern Baptists, reported that an unnamed official in the Reagan administration encouraged a prominent fundamentalist leader to press for an SBC resolution supporting the amendment. The story cited Edward E. McAteer's statements that he was in contact with the administration as he worked to pass an SBC resolution on the issue. McAteer was a leading SBC fundamentalist and a member of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, one of the largest churches aligned with the fundamentalist faction in SBC politics. He was also head of the Religious Roundtable, one of the leading organizations of the Christian Right,

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[55]Herbert H. Denton and Marjorie Hyer, "President to Ask Hill for Prayer Amendment," *The Washington Post*, Final Edition, 7 May 1982, Section A, 1.

consisting mostly of conservative clergy from various denominations. SBC president Bailey Smith helped McAteer's efforts when he appointed Norris W. Sydor, director of the Maryland chapter of Religious Roundtable and a longtime McAteer associate, chair of the convention's Committee on Resolutions. It was the first annual convention Sydor had attended. Following the story, the *Standard* ran a furious editorial condemning the activities of Sydor and McAteer at the convention. The article reminded Baptists that such involvement between the White House and a religious organization would have been roundly condemned if the president were "John Kennedy and the organization the Catholic Church." In a statement that revealed the growing chasm between Texas Baptists and the national convention, the editorial asked, "Are there any Baptists left who doubt the crumbling of the wall of separation between church and state?"[56] The reaction of Texas Baptists to the controversy was another indication that the state convention would not follow the national leadership in aligning the SBC with the Christian Right and the Republican Party.

As they had done with Nixon, Texas Baptists strenuously opposed Reagan in his quest to grant federal aid to private schools. At the prompting of evangelicals and conservative Catholics, Reagan announced in 1982 his support for a bill that would have provided tuition tax credits to families with children enrolled in private schools. Lauding the program as "an alternative to public education," Reagan promised to press for its passage even in the face of overwhelming resistance in Congress. He announced his support for the program to the National Catholic Educational Conference, prompting critics to note that it

[56]"Editorial: The White House and SBC Resolutions," *The Baptist Standard*, 21 July 1982, 6.

would primarily benefit parents with children enrolled in parochial schools. At the time, over 70 percent of students enrolled in nonpublic schools attended Catholic schools.[57] The bill was the earliest version of a national school voucher program and the forerunner to contemporary proposals to provide public funding for private education. The response of Texas Baptist leaders was resoundingly negative. A *Standard* editorial condemned public funding for private education as a violation of the separation of church and state. The editorial revealed an interesting divergence from the actions of Christian Right leaders. While Jerry Falwell put aside his theological misgivings to work with charismatic evangelist Pat Robertson and Catholic Richard Viguerie, Texas Baptists were unwilling to forsake their theological concerns about Catholicism. The editorial blasted Baptist supporters of the bill for forming an alliance with Catholics that would ultimately result in "the government . . . subsidizing parochial schools." The editorial made clear its opposition to government funding of any private schools, but it was especially harsh in its comments regarding parochial schools. Worrying that "the parochial school lobby could continue to seek to increase government funding of its schools," the article admonished leaders of the national SBC to avoid alliances that mainly benefit Catholics.[58]

On the issue of vouchers, James Dunn led the Texas Baptist resistance to the national leadership. He routinely criticized attempts by Baptist leaders to support public funding for private schools. He was a frequent thorn in the side of

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[57]Rich Jaroslovsky, "Reagan Proposes Tuition Tax Credit Plan and Reaffirms Opposition to Rise in Taxes," *The Wall Street Journal*, Final Edition, 16 April 19 1982, Section A, 4.
[58]"Editorial: Tuition Tax Credits Should Be Opposed," *The Baptist Standard*, 1 September 1982, 6.

fundamentalist leaders, who heartily embraced Reagan's plans for school vouchers. In his opposition to the plan, Dunn cited "the basic principles . . . of church-state separation and the violation that is incurred when tax dollars go into private channels; concern for the good of public education" and "anxiety about anything that would siphon off support for public education; and concern for education of minorities and the poor."[59] He also believed that public funding of private schools could create a system of competition that would ultimately undermine the public school system. To Dunn, the voucher system would create "divisiveness in our social fabric of a competing school system" and the "development of two separate school systems" that would merge the interests of government and private religious groups in troubling ways.[60] By virtue of his post with the BJCPA, he offered Texas Baptists a voice in the national convention. He repeatedly used that voice to articulate the opposition of Texas Baptists to the fundamentalist alliance with the Christian Right and the Republican Party.

By the 1984 presidential election, conservative Christians had established themselves as a powerful voting bloc within the Republican Party, with white evangelicals having abandoned Jimmy Carter for Reagan in the 1980 election. Reagan had assiduously courted the group throughout his first term. But even as the political winds were changing, Texas Baptists continued to offer a very different response to Reagan's alliance with the Christian Right than many of their evangelical counterparts. Preceding the Republican Convention, the *Standard* ran an editorial reminding Baptists that the vote was "not a contest as

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[59]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 18 November 1986), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 162.
[60]Ibid.

to who will be pastor of the United States, but who will be president" and that "the vote primarily is to determine the political rather than the spiritual leader of the nation."[61] Although the editorial did not specifically attack Reagan or his Christian Right allies, it offered a starkly different view of church/state issues than was becoming the norm for conservative southern Protestants. "The state is not the church and does not need an elected or appointed pastor, evangelist, bishop or pope to run the affairs of state," the article noted, adding that "the church is not the state and does not need an elected or appointed president, senator, congressman or governor to run the affairs of the church."[62] The editorial was yet another reminder that Texas Baptists were not supportive of the politicization of southern religion that paved the way for Reagan's alliance with the Christian Right.

The years between 1970 and 1984 were ones of great political, social, and religious change in the United States. In general, white southerners shifted to the Republican Party, the Christian Right established itself as a political force, and its leaders made attacking church/state separation one of the movement's central political aims. But it is important to note that, for all these changes, Texas Baptists ended the period mostly on the same ideological terrain as when it commenced. On issues of politics, no impulse was more overriding than the historic Baptist fidelity to the principle of church/state separation. The difference is that by 1984, that position placed them mostly at odds with the national denomination and with the political winds that were changing the American South

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[61]"Editorial: Implications of Religion in Presidential Race," *Baptist Standard*, August 22, 1984, 6.
[62]Ibid.

into a bastion of Republican politics and a haven for Christian Right causes. The story of Texas Baptists during the 1970s and early 1980s is one that should give pause to historians who have assumed a natural cohesion between devout Southern Baptists and the new movement of social conservatives that came to dominate the Republican Party in the 1980s. Texas Baptists never abandoned their core emphases of missions, evangelism, and personal redemption. They simply rejected the shift away from church/state separation and argued that a pro-separation position was more in keeping with historic Baptist principles than the pet causes of the Christian Right. Their experience in the 1970s and 1980s belies the popular narrative that southern evangelicals made easy alliance with the Christian Right and the Republican Party. In fact, not all southern evangelicals found the alliance appealing, and Texas Baptists continued to oppose it long after the Christian Right had established itself as a powerful force in national politics.

Chapter 3

Fundamentalist Fighters: The Conservative Insurgency and Texas Baptists, 1960-1985

As the 1960s came to a close, Paul Pressler penned an article in the *Baptist Standard* that generated a good deal of controversy in Texas and national Baptist circles. Pressler, a Houston judge who was a leading critic of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the 1960s and 1970s, claimed that "belief in the authority of the Scripture has been undermined by some who would call themselves Christian scholars . . . . Individuals are urged to go in cafeteria style and use their own tastes in selecting those passages which they consider worthy of being God's revelation, leaving behind those passages and doctrines which they do not like."[1] Pressler's complaints were common to Southern Baptist conservatives in the 1960s and 1970s, and he was a central figure in the movement to gain control of the convention for those who believed it had become too tolerant of theological diversity and too slow in combating new understandings of science, biblical truth, and history. The battle between Pressler and his allies and those Baptists who opposed their takeover of the SBC is a complicated subject and one that still provokes raw emotions from participants. But the struggle for control of the nation's largest Protestant denomination provided a forum for debating larger issues, and understanding the conflict is essential to explaining the changing religious and political landscape of the post-1950 South.

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[1]Paul Pressler, "Respect and Authority," *Baptist Standard*, July 9, 1969, 13.

The question of why Texas Baptists formulated such an ardent response to the rise of the Christian Right is a difficult question and one with numerous answers. But their experience with fundamentalists in the national SBC and in their own state pushed them away from an alliance with religious conservatives and towards a more moderate politics in the 1960s and 1970s.[2] One of the most fascinating aspects of Baptist politics during this time is that two of the main proponents of fundamentalism in the national convention were Texas Baptists, despite the fact that most Texas Baptists were more moderate. Pressler was an important figure in the fundamentalist movement, but it was his ally Paige Patterson who had the greatest influence on the convention's conservative drift. President of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, Patterson was relentless in his attacks on faculty members at Baptist seminaries, colleges, and universities and unambiguous in his position that the denomination should be purged of anyone refusing to adhere to strict conservative theology and politics. These two leaders were renegade Texas Baptists who consistently opposed the leadership of the state convention and pushed for an alliance between the Christian Right and Southern Baptists. They ultimately won control of the SBC but never managed to do so in their own state, where they eventually broke away

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[2]The term "fundamentalist" can be contentious and many Southern Baptist conservatives deplore use of the term to describe themselves. In my work, I have followed Nancy Ammerman's lead in using the term in "its historic sense, not with any pejorative intent. During the earlier part of the twentieth century, the term was coined by groups that chose to fight to defend their traditional understanding of the Bible against the onslaughts of liberalism and the social gospel . . . They intentionally organized against a real threat to what they believed. The threat and the organization are what distinguish fundamentalists from ordinary believers or traditionalists." Ammerman also pointed out that using the term "fundamentalists" helps distinguish between various types of conservatives. Even the "moderates" were conservative in their theology. Rather than call those to the right of moderates "ultra-conservatives," Ammerman chose to use the term "fundamentalists." For a complete description of her statements on terms, see *Baptist Battles*, 16-17.

and formed a rival group to the Baptist General Convention of Texas.[3] As Pressler and Patterson joined with fundamentalists to purge the denomination of theological dissenters or those perceived to be sympathetic to their cause, they alienated many Texas Baptist leaders. Without question, the intensity of the struggle for denominational control played an important role in shaping Texas Baptists' response to the Christian Right. That struggle forced Baptists to take sides against one another long before the Christian Right formally organized as an ally of the Republican Party.

From an outside perspective, the intra-denominational battle between fundamentalist Baptists and their opponents can be difficult to understand. After all, each side can be fairly described as theologically conservative, and the differences between the groups are negligible when placed on the broader national religious spectrum. But for both sides, the struggle was a defining event and one that forever changed how Southern Baptists viewed the world and themselves. The conflict was between fundamentalists, who wanted to purge the denomination of theological liberals, and moderates, who argued that the traditional Baptist doctrine of soul liberty required toleration of theological diversity in the denomination. These moderates were supporters of "the Grand Compromise" about which historian Barry Hankins has written extensively. While fundamentalists argued that denominational unity should be based on a shared confession of faith, moderates believed it should be "organizational and

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[3]For a detailed description of these two Texas Baptists, see Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), especially pages 6-7, 51, and 237.

institutional instead of confessional."[4] For most of the twentieth century, the SBC was led by moderates who accepted theological diversity as one of their guiding principles. In fact, a left wing did exist, consisting of Southern Baptists who pushed the denominational leadership to be more liberal on issues of race, gender, and poverty. Historian David Strickin has called the heritage of these liberal Baptists "a genealogy of dissent."[5] A right wing also existed, composed of fundamentalists like Patterson and Pressler. The conservative and liberal wings of the denomination remained on the fringe of denominational politics throughout most of the twentieth century, with moderates holding the most power. These moderates tended to be conservative on issues of theology but were mostly unwilling to oust liberals or require the stringent confessional statements that fundamentalists advocated.[6]

Texas Baptists held a firm commitment to the moderate cause, which had a profound impact on their relationship with the Christian Right. It helps explain why Texas Baptists bucked the national trend in avoiding alliances with leaders like Jerry Falwell. Hankins has argued that during the 1970s the SBC was "held together by centrists . . . who tolerated ideological diversity for the sake of missions and evangelism." That truce ended in 1979 when the convention elected as its president Adrien Rogers, a candidate backed by conservatives determined to rid the denomination of theological liberals and enforce ideological litmus tests for positions in the convention. Rogers was a staunch ally of Pressler

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[4]Hankins, 34.
[5]David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).
[6]Hankins, 1-3.

and Patterson, who strongly supported his election.[7] The national convention's willingness to embrace Pressler and Patterson's agenda would ultimately leave a bad taste in the mouths of Texas Baptist leaders for the agenda of the Christian Right, which was becoming synonymous with the political agenda of the SBC.

To understand Texas Baptists' reaction to the fundamentalist takeover of their denomination, historians must contend with a singular truth: the politicization of Baptist religion did not come easy to most of the denomination's members. One of the most careful scholars to study the conflict for control of the SBC is Nancy Ammerman, and she puts it this way: "Thinking in political terms did not come naturally for most Baptists. They have thought of their denomination in many other terms . . . but the language of politics was not their native tongue."[8] But fundamentalist leaders concluded that the only way to ensure doctrinal purity and to force the convention in a conservative direction was to elect presidents of the convention who agreed with them and would appoint only like-minded people to serve on various boards and committees. This push was surprising and difficult to understand for many Baptists who "had no experience in being asked to support candidates for any reason other than their reputation as preachers or denominational statesmen."[9]

From the earliest moments of the controversy, Texas Baptists resented and resisted the fundamentalist push to oust fellow members, enforce doctrinal purity, and lead the convention in a different direction than it had followed for at

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[7]Hankins, 4.
[8]Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 168.
[9]Ibid.

least the previous fifty years. But it is important to note that they were not aligned with the denomination's left wing, which constantly prodded the leadership to be more vocal in pressing for broad changes in women's rights, race relations, and economic equality. Ammerman has pointed out the difference between these progressives who "were adopting new social and political views and giving their theology an intellectual foundation" and the moderates who were guided first and foremost by "loyalty to programs and institutions." Moderates were "traditional Southern Baptists who were proud of what they had accomplished," particularly their educational institutions, influence in southern culture, and missions program.[10] According to Ammerman's statistics, based on an intricate series of theological and social questions, these moderates made up about 45 percent of the denomination by the early 1980s. Progressives made up about 15 percent, and fundamentalists represented 40 percent. For readers unfamiliar with the Baptist struggle, it is essential to recognize that Texas Baptists identified with the larger group of moderates who sought to maintain harmony, not the progressives or fundamentalists who wanted to pull the denomination in a sharp direction away from where it had traditionally been. As Ammerman puts it, these moderates "were confident that the vast majority of their fellow church members were conservative enough to please everyone. Fundamentalist cries of alarm were as foreign to them as was the progressives' agitation for change."[11]

As early as 1976, well before fundamentalists formally elected the first president from their faction, Texas Baptists were warning about the dangers of a

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[10]Ammerman, 73.
[11]Ibid.

convention takeover. A stinging editorial labeled the conservative faction "20th century Sadducees and Pharisees" and "disciples of discord" who "launch their crusade on myths and assure peaks of perfection for all who follow."[12] The editorial condemned the fundamentalist movement to gain control of the convention in the most unequivocal of terms: "A friend of ours once wrote a book entitled *Fleas Come with the Dog*. It had nothing to do with the Southern Baptist Convention but his title would be appropriate." Lest any readers be confused about who the "fleas" were, the editors continued: "There may be a bit of value in the fleas. They keep us alert despite the distraction from more important things. But, dog-like, we wish these fleas would go elsewhere if they don't like us. Or, at least quit arguing that fleas own the dog."[13] As with other moderate Baptists, the *Standard* editors did not quarrel with the fundamentalists' conservative theology. On the contrary, a cursory reading of Texas Baptist thought reveals a theology that was equally committed to traditional Christian understandings of biblical issues. Rather, the disagreement was in the nature of the threat. While fundamentalists were convinced the denomination was becoming a bastion of liberalism, Texas Baptists saw these "trumpets of alarm" as distractions from the true mission of the convention. They noted that "the Southern Baptist Convention was organized 'for the promotion of Christian missions at home and abroad and any other objects such as Christian education, benevolent enterprises, and social services.'" Those deviating from these goals were "organized to divide and

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[12]"Disciples of Discord," *Baptist Standard*, April 28, 1976, 6.
[13]Ibid.

distract" and "should go their own way."[14] Of course, those fundamentalist "fleas" did just the opposite, and their crusade to wrest control of the SBC from moderates would continue on for years, placing them in direct conflict with the moderate leadership and their Texas Baptist supporters.

By the late 1970s mainstream Texas Baptists were convinced that their denomination was under siege from fundamentalists, and they were keenly aware that two of the movement's leaders were from their own state: Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler. The same men who battled Texas Baptists over church/state separation and involvement with the Republican Party also pushed for conservative control of SBC institutions. Like other moderate Baptists, the Texas leadership was not especially concerned with divisive theological disputes, but they were very interested in defending Baptist institutions from conservative attacks. A 1980 *Standard* editorial identified Patterson and Pressler as the leaders of "a well-organized group of Southern Baptists" whose intention was "to lead the convention to secure elected leadership from among those committed to biblical inerrancy and the leadership of the denomination be committed to the reliability of the scriptures."[15] Noting that the group had alleged that "liberal" teachings were prevalent on Baptist college campuses, the editorial was careful not to denounce the goal of conservative theology, even while maintaining that these charges were overblown. Patterson's charge that "a very large constituency in significant denominational posts" rejected the authority of the

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[14]Ibid.
[15]"Editorial: Concerns about 'Concerned' Organization," *Baptist Standard*, April 23, 1980, 6.

Bible drew particular ire from the *Standard*.[16]

Challenging Patterson and Pressler to produce specific names, the editorial expressed "concern with the implication that all of the past and current boards and commissions, elected by the Southern Baptist Convention, have not been vigilant in keeping the institutions under their charge committed to historic Baptist beliefs. If so, who and where?"[17] Once again, it is important to understand that, unlike the progressive wing of the convention, which was composed mostly of college and seminary professors and their allies, Texas Baptists were not prodding for new understandings on issues of race, gender, or theology. They were chiefly committed to defending the integrity of Baptist institutions, some of which were located in Texas and served as a great source of pride for the state convention. They were also worried that rampant charges of doctrinal heresy could "drive a wedge between pastors and laymen by suggesting that since many pastors lack the courage to deal with denominational problems, the task must go to the laymen."[18] Texas Baptists were quite conservative in their theology, and it would be wrong to place them in the relatively small camp of progressive Baptists who pushed theological boundaries and prodded the denomination on social justice issues. But they viewed the fundamentalist crusade as an unnecessary distraction from denominational work and a dishonest threat to Baptist unity. Their stance against the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC would lead them to part company with other members of the Christian Right and to be suspicious of attempts to use Christianity in service of a

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[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.

conservative political agenda.

Texas Baptists also opposed fundamentalists because they believed their singular focus on establishing a doctrinal creed was in contradiction to Baptist principles. The whole debate over creeds, or statements of belief, in the Southern Baptist Convention can be difficult for outsiders to understand. After all, in a denomination dominated by theological conservatives and with a reputation for being extremely orthodox, did fundamentalists really have much to worry about? Barry Hankins' work on this controversy is illuminating and helps explain why it generated such animosity among Baptists who seemed to share almost all of the same beliefs. "In many cases, very conservative and orthodox Southern Baptist moderates were tarred with accusations that would have made Joseph McCarthy blush," he writes. It is almost impossible to overstate the impact these charges of theological liberalism had on Southern Baptists who were anything but liberal. Moderates "charged repeatedly that conservative theology was being used as a cover for the rawest and crudest grab for power." Besides that, they believed that "conservative insistence on inerrancy amounted to an un-Baptist form of creedalism."[19] Texas Baptists fell squarely into this camp, and they resented insinuations that their denomination or its institutions were anything less than faithful to traditional Christian teachings.

Foy Valentine was one of the more influential Texas Baptists during the 1970s and 1980s, and he spent much of his time fighting back fundamentalist influence in his denomination. He served as director of the Christian Life Commission at the national level for much of the time period, and he used his

[19]Hankins, 7.

platform to oppose conservative Baptists like Pressler and Patterson. By the mid-1970s, they had antagonized him to the point that he considered them political enemies. He was especially frustrated by their alliance with Jerry Falwell, who had been criticizing the SBC for years for not pursuing a right-wing political agenda. He articulated his exasperation by saying, "Jerry Falwell really acts as if he thinks God were a Republican. And I just--- as I have told Jerry, 'God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and we don't need to try to get him in one pocket or the other.'"[20] He also disagreed with fundamentalist attempts to affiliate the Baptist faith with one particular political movement. "The fundamentalist movement," he argued, "led by Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson have identified so closely with the right wing in the political and social and economic arena in America today that they are, for all practical purposes, a kept people, a kind of chaplain to power."[21] Particularly on the issue of church/state separation, Valentine quarreled with Christian Right leaders, believing their agenda too exclusive. He worried about Baptist involvement with that agenda, noting the implications for traditional Baptist teachings on the separation of church and state. "With regard to morality in general," he said, "they have represented a commitment to a narrow agenda . . . In which focus is made on abortion and separation of church and state, which they consider a 'shibboleth of doctrinaire secularism,' words incidentally of Roman Catholic prelates."[22] Valentine lost most of his battles with Pressler at the national level, but he helped ensure that Texas

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[20]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 3.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid.

Baptists would remain in the moderate camp, with the state's leadership opposing the fundamentalist push by Pressler, Patterson, and others.

In 1981, Texas Baptists were busy sounding the alarm about the dangers of adopting a new convention-wide creed. A scathing editorial by E. S. James, editor of the *Standard*, left little doubt where the state's leadership stood on the subject of doctrinal statements. He favorably quoted a prominent moderate Baptist who insisted that "a narrow creedal statement will cause irreversible rupture of fellowship in the convention." But James did not stop there; he moved on to list the end results of forcing a conservative doctrinal creed on Southern Baptists. He argued that it could "drive thousands of pastors and churches out of the convention; require an inquisition in every school, state convention, association, and denominational institution; cause many to designate funds only to causes controlled by 'true Southern Baptists'; and lead others to withdraw in disgust."[23] As Baptist moderates were prone to do, James invoked the denomination's history to support his view that creeds were unnecessary distractions from denominational unity. He quoted W. G. Johnson, the SBC's first president who stated, "We have constructed for our basis no new creed; acting in this matter upon a Baptist aversion for all creeds but the Bible." In his stance, James was a classical Baptist moderate, chiefly concerned with denominational unity for the purpose of missions and evangelism. James insisted that, "The tie that has bound Southern Baptists together has been a common faith and a commitment to promotion of Christian missions, education and evangelism." He conceded that prior statements of faith (passed in 1925 and 1963) were

[23]"Southern Baptist Convention Going Creedal?" *Baptist Standard*, May 27, 1981, 6.

important documents, but he was sure they were "not to be tests of orthodoxy but as expressed in the preface, 'guidelines in interpretations, having no authority over conscience.'"[24] That the official news organ of Texas Baptists was ardent in its opposition to any new Baptist creeds was a strong indication of where the leadership stood in the ongoing struggle for control of the convention.

While the usual suspects of E. S. James and Foy Valentine were strident in opposing creeds, another important Texas Baptist tried to find middle ground between fundamentalists and moderates. Jimmy Draper, a West Texan who served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1982-1984, proposed in 1983 that Southern Baptists adopt four points of belief that could unite Baptists, without forcing a denominational schism over minor points of theology. These beliefs included, "the full humanity and deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement by Christ for the sins of mankind, justification by God's grace through faith and the bodily resurrection of Christ."[25] He argued that these beliefs constituted a core area of agreement that could satisfy fundamentalists, moderates, and those not affiliated with either camp. Texas Baptists leaders responded without the typical outrage at creedalism, perhaps in deference to Draper, who was one of their own. James penned an editorial lauding Draper for "continuing to sound the note of unity" and agreeing that the four suggested points "should be believed by any Christian."[26] But even as he refrained from attacking Draper, he also pointed out that, "Creeds have a tendency to divide, rather than unify" and insisted that "Bible-believing Baptists are preferable to

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[24]Ibid.
[25]"Bible-believing, Creed-Carrying Baptists?," *Baptist Standard*, November 30, 1983, 6.
[26]Ibid.

creed-carrying Baptists." He predicted that "Drawing up a creed, if it ever could be done, would please neither fundamentalists, moderates or that large number of Southern Baptists in between which wear neither of these labels."[27] His statements on the subject of creeds was certainly in line with the mainstream of Baptist thought; Baptist churches at the time (as now) made no use whatsoever of creeds in their services. James' prediction was ultimately correct; the ensuing years would witness a final split between moderate and fundamentalist Baptists. The ramifications of that controversy shaped the Texas Baptist response to the organization of the Christian Right and pushed the state convention away from an alliance with religious conservatives and the Republican Party.

When Southern Baptists met for their annual meeting in 1979, few in the crowd had any idea that the year would mark a turning point for the national convention, away from moderation and towards fundamentalism. Smartly, Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler kept their strategy to gain control of the convention a secret from most delegates. But they did have a clear plan: "The conservative strategy, unknown to most at the time and denied by conservatives until years later, was to use the appointive powers of the SBC presidency to remake the boards of the denominational agencies and seminaries."[28] While a majority of Southern Baptists voted for presidents not on the basis of which faction they belonged to, but on credentials, experience, and likeability, fundamentalist leaders recognized the importance of strict control over the president's office. Patterson and Pressler calculated "that if conservatives could hold the

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[27]Ibid.
[28]Hankins, 6.

presidency for ten years, they could achieve a majority on all the boards . . . The president appoints members of a body that then appoints the trustees for the denominational agencies and seminaries. If he makes his appointments carefully . . . over time the agencies would reflect the tenor of the conservative movement."[29] In 1979 fundamentalists worked diligently to elect Adrien Rogers, a conservative pastor from Memphis, as president of the convention. He received 51 percent of the vote out of a field of six candidates, becoming the first Southern Baptist president committed to Patterson and Pressler's project of remaking the convention. The strategy ultimately worked to perfection. Many Baptists at the time thought little of Rogers' election. But scholars of Baptist politics ultimately came to view the 1979 convention not as a "temporary interruption of the Grand Compromise that had kept moderates in control," but as "the beginning of the conservative takeover of the denomination."[30]

By 1980, the fundamentalist plan was becoming clearer, and Texas Baptists were increasingly alarmed at the prospect that it would succeed. In April of that year, the *Standard* ran an investigative piece that identified major players in the fundamentalist movement and acknowledged that their goal was complete control of the convention. In retrospect, the piece does not seem surprising, but for a state Baptist newspaper to make such charges against fellow Texas Baptists was a bold move. The article began by noting that Patterson and Pressler were the forces behind Adrien Rogers' election as SBC president. It also claimed that their work was specifically aimed to determine "who is elected SBC

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[29]Ibid, 6-7.
[30]Ibid, 7.

president for at least four consecutive years and maybe as many as 10, and through presidential appointments try to control nomination of trustees of SBC agencies."[31] By that time, Pressler and Patterson had begun to move from clandestine operations to a public campaign to win over Southern Baptists to their side. On April 3, Patterson made his first public statements about what he believed was "the problem" of liberalism in the SBC. He and Pressler announced that they had contacted Baptists in every state organization who were willing to work with them to elect conservative presidents and to ensure that any denominational leaders who did not subscribe to their fundamentalist beliefs would be removed from leadership.[32]

Patterson was the main speaker at the meeting, and he made clear that his goal was to organize in advance of the annual SBC meeting in St. Louis later that year. To motivate activists, he returned to the question of "inerrancy," which fundamentalists had pushed at the 1979 convention. He made clear how he defined the issue and the stakes for the future of Baptist life: "The issue still is truth--- is the Bible in fact totally and completely true?"[33] His definition of inerrancy "would be that there was no mistake in the original autographs of the scriptures." He acknowledged that "transcribal inadvertencies" existed but insisted that the only issues with the Bible were "scribal problems that can be worked out gradually."[34] Significantly, he refused to acknowledge any historical, geographical, or scientific errors in the text of the Bible.

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[31]Toby Druin, "At Least Four Years, Maybe 10: Seek Long Range Control of SBC Boards," *Baptist Standard*, April 23, 1980, 4.
[32]Ibid.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid, 5.

The issue of inerrancy was brought up quite deliberately by the fundamentalist camp, and it worked not only as a religious issue but as a political one. Patterson knew full well that many moderates in denominational leadership, for all their theological conservatism, would not refer to the Bible as "inerrant," due to historic or scientific quibbles. In setting up the issue as the main focus of his movement, he seemed to drive a stake through the heart of the consensus that had held together liberals, moderates, conservatives, and fundamentalists for many years. Like fundamentalists in the early part of the twentieth century, he focused his attacks not on laypeople but on the denomination's leadership. "I am of the opinion that most Baptists hold such (conservative) beliefs," he said. "But I am also of the persuasion that a very large contingency in significant denominational posts do not in fact believe that any longer."[35] When pressed about the wisdom of such a naked political strategy in a denomination that had generally eschewed political infighting, he responded with an attack on fellow Texas Baptist Jimmy Allen, a leader in the Texas Christian Life Commission. He insisted that it was Allen who started the political games by organizing to run for president several years earlier, a claim Allen vehemently denied.[36]

At the 1980 convention, Patterson and his allies managed to elect one of their supporters, Bailey Smith, president on the first ballot. The *Standard* responded with an editorial lamenting the open political posturing by the fundamentalist side and the loss of their favored candidate, moderate stalwart Richard Jackson of Phoenix. The editorial placed Texas Baptists firmly on the

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[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.

opposite side of Patterson and Pressler: "Southern Baptists grabbing for power in denominational political parties will spoil Southern Baptists . . . Why do Baptist people have to borrow the ways of big-time secular politics to do their work? The world expects better, and surely God expects better."[37] While editors of the *Standard* stopped short of endorsing political organizing by opponents of fundamentalism, they hinted strongly that it might eventually be necessary. "The success of one political party which is well-organized and goal-oriented inevitably leads to another of the same kind by the opposition," they wrote. "A one-party system leads to a two-party system. And talk of such an organization to counter the Paige Patterson-Paul Pressler party was heard often in St. Louis."[38] Despite their frustrations, Texas Baptist leaders were still reluctant to offer a blanket condemnation of the fundamentalists and remained probably more hopeful about the convention's direction than events warranted. They took heart in statements by Bailey Smith that he "would not try to run the seminaries" and "would be president of all" Southern Baptists. But they warned that the "significance of the St. Louis convention is sizable" and anticipated that "valuable energies and resources will be expended in an ongoing fight against each other."[39] By 1980, Texas Baptist leaders may not have realized it, but their break with the direction of the national convention had already occurred.

Besides the election of Smith, Texas Baptists were also concerned over a specific resolution on "doctrinal integrity" that the convention added to the Baptist Faith and Message, the official doctrinal statement of Southern Baptists. Since

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[37]"Editorials: Significance of the St. Louis Convention," *Baptist Standard*, June 18, 1980, 6.
[38]Ibid.
[39]Ibid.

1963, the section on the Bible had been a fairly standard conservative recitation of belief about the Scriptures. For example, it called the Bible "divinely inspired" and "the record of God's revelation of himself to man." It had also stated that the Bible was "truth, without any mixture of error" and "the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried."[40] But the 1980 convention added to that statement a clause that moderate Baptists believed was aimed directly at seminary professors, elected denominational leaders, and full-time administrators who did not belong to Patterson's faction. It required that "seminaries and other institutions receiving our support only employ, and continue the employment of faculty members and professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible, the infallibility of the original manuscripts and that the Bible is truth without any error."[41] Depending on how that statement was interpreted, it could result in the firing of Baptists who believed in the Bible as spiritual truth, but acknowledged areas where the literal text was incongruent with modern scientific or historical knowledge. In other words, a person could be a theological conservative, but not take every sentence of the Bible to be literally true and find herself at odds with the official doctrinal statement of the Southern Baptist Church. From the beginning, moderates believed this push for inerrancy was directly tied to Patterson's desire to purge the convention of those who opposed his faction.

As with other controversial issues in the 1970s and 1980s, James Dunn was central in shaping the response of Texas Baptists. As head of the Texas

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[40]A copy of the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message* can be found at www.baptiststart.com/print/1963_baptist_faith_message.htm

[41]"Editorials: Significance of the St. Louis Convention," *Baptist Standard*, June 18, 1980, 6.

Christian Life Commission (TCLC) from 1968-1980, he was an early opponent of Patterson, Pressler, and their fundamentalist allies. Like E. S. James, Jimmy Allen, and other Texas Baptist leaders, he believed this resolution and the push for inerrancy would divide Baptists and defy the Baptist tradition of "soul liberty," the doctrine allowing for each believer to develop her or his own theological views. That doctrine had been a hallmark of Baptist faith for years, and it assumed that each person was responsible for her or his own religion. For that reason, supporters of "soul liberty" had generally opposed creeds.[42] Dunn insisted that it "was very un-Baptistic . . . to make some kind of convention statement. It's not even consistent with what we believe about local autonomy or the priesthood of the believer."[43] He insisted that under normal circumstances, Baptists "would have gone against it overwhelmingly as an attempted intrusion into the autonomy of the local church." But by using "emotional rhetoric," fundamentalists slowly gained support at the national level.[44] Dunn was quite influential in Texas Baptists circles, and he was one of several important Baptists in the state who strongly opposed fundamentalist efforts in the national convention. Because fundamentalists were also aligned with the Christian Right, this trend ensured that Texas Baptists would not eagerly support leaders like Jerry Falwell.

As the fundamentalists gained control of leadership positions in the denomination, they moved away from the traditional Baptist support for strict

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[42]For more on soul liberty, see Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
[43]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 13 June 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 29.
[44]Ibid., 29-30.

church/state separation. This trend had huge implications for national politics, occurring as it did around the same time the Christian Right was formally organizing, particularly with the 1979 founding of Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority.[45] It also led the fundamentalist leaders of the SBC into conflict with Texas Baptists, who mostly held true to the traditional Baptist resistance to any merging of the church with the state. In the early 1980s, the issue that most clearly demonstrated this parting of ways was the question of organized prayer in public schools. For many years leading up to the fundamentalist push for control of the SBC, Southern Baptists had been among the fiercest opponents of organized school prayer, on the grounds that any government involvement with such prayers represented an establishment of religion that violated church/state separation. To be clear, Southern Baptists had never opposed voluntary prayer, but had maintained that when it was organized and mandated in public schools, it was a violation of the separation of church and state. This belief was reflected in all SBC resolutions on the issue before 1982; these resolutions "affirm(ed) separation of church and state" and insisted "that the school, as an arm of the state, has no business mandating, organizing, promoting or encouraging prayer or other devotional exercises." Southern Baptists generally, and moderates in particular, viewed such activities as "an establishment of religion that is by its very nature coercive for dissenting students and demeaning to prayer."[46] It was this viewpoint on school prayer that the fundamentalists took issue with, and the

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[45]For further reading on the Moral Majority and the early history of the Christian Right, please see Ruth Murray Brown, *For a Christian America: A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2002); and William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996).
[46]Hankins, 144.

disagreement over it further exacerbated tensions between Texas Baptists and the fundamentalist leadership of the national convention.

The interesting aspect of this controversy is that most Baptists had originally supported the *Engel vs. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington vs. Schemp* (1963) Supreme Court decisions that formally banned organized prayer in public schools. A 1964 convention resolution endorsed the Court's rulings on school prayer, a position from which Baptists would not deviate for many years. At the 1969 annual meeting, messengers embraced a resolution insisting that the decisions "did not restrain the free exercise of personal religion but restrained public officials from using their public office for promotion of religious experience."[47] Two years later, the convention adopted a resolution on "Voluntary Prayer" that depicted organized prayer as a threat to private expressions of religion. That resolution also took issue with attempts to pass a constitutional amendment allowing organized prayer in public schools, putting the SBC on record opposing any such amendment. As late as 1980, a year after fundamentalists elected Adrien Rogers president of the SBC, Southern Baptists adopted a resolution that criticized attempts "either by law or other means to circumvent the Supreme Court's decisions forbidding government authored or sponsored religious exercises in public schools."[48] It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that many conservative Baptists began to side with the Christian Right on the question of whether government-sponsored school prayer was appropriate.

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[47]Hankins, 145.
[48]Ibid.

The question for historians is how so many conservative Baptists, after years of support for church/state separation, came to condone organized school prayer by the early 1980s. After extensive interviews with Southern Baptist conservatives, Hankins attempted an answer to that question: "Quite simply," he wrote, "they became convinced that the Court's rulings were being used to secularize public schools and to discriminate against religious students."[49] The claim that religious students were being discriminated against was dubious from the start, given that the entire debate revolved not around voluntary prayer, but whether or not conservative Christians could use government-funded schools to organize evangelical prayers for all students. For all the rhetoric about persecution of Christian students, the main point of debate between fundamentalist and moderate Baptists was whether public schools were a proper vehicle with which to push an evangelical agenda. Regardless of their reasoning and despite the protests of moderates, Southern Baptists on a national level moved in the clear direction of embracing school prayer as an issue of fundamental importance.

After Adrian Rogers' election as president of the SBC in 1979, he caused a stir with comments about school prayer that seemed to break with the Baptist tradition of supporting church/state separation. In early 1980, he went on record as favoring the removal of school prayer issues from the jurisdiction of the federal courts. He argued that "state judges ruling on the matter of prayer" would be beneficial because "federal judges are not without error" and stating that "some of us had rather trust the sensitivity of those judges closer to and more

[49]Ibid.

responsible to us."[50] His new stance seemed to be diametrically opposed to past Southern Baptist resolutions supporting the federal courts and portraying them as the final gatekeepers of religious liberty, which would be violated by organized school prayer. To justify his stance, Rogers returned to a frequent theme of fundamentalists: an almost hysterical fear of American secularism. "We've come to the place," Rogers argued, of an "almost anti-God" control of education. "Public schools have become like 'Sunday Schools' for humanism," he argued.[51]

Rogers's comments did not occur in a political vacuum; on the contrary, he made these remarks in the context of a very specific endorsement of a proposed amendment by Jesse Helms, the famed North Carolina senator most known for his conservative views on race, but also an ally of the Christian Right. Helms's amendment would have taken the issue of school prayer out of the jurisdiction of the federal courts and into state courts, where he believed judges would be more supportive of state-sponsored prayer. The endorsement of such an amendment by a Southern Baptist president elicited a furious response from Baptist moderates. In a pointed statement, James E. Wood, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, called the amendment "dangerous" and said it would "set a precedent for the destruction of First Amendment freedoms if there is a majority in Congress who disapprove of a particular Supreme Court interpretation of the Constitution."[52] Wood and Rogers held a public forum in which they agreed to disagree, but the battles lines were being drawn, and Texas Baptists would increasingly be forced to side with their own

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[50]"Rogers, Wood: They Agreeably Disagree," *Baptist Standard*, February 27, 1980, 4.
[51]Ibid.
[52]Ibid.

traditional support for church/state separation and against the leadership of their denomination.

In 1982, after several years of successful efforts to elect fundamentalist presidents of the SBC, conservatives passed a resolution that seemed to undercut Baptist support for the separation of church and state. That year, Republican President Ronald Reagan was pushing Congress to adopt a federal amendment on the school prayer issue. The proposed amendment read: "Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayer in public schools or other public institutions. No person shall be required by the United States or by any state to participate in prayer."[53] The wording was somewhat ambiguous, but opponents of the measure believed that the endorsement of "group prayer" would allow school administrators and teachers to push organized prayer without fear or consequences. Such organized prayer was exactly the kind of activity that Baptists had previously opposed on grounds that it violated the separation of church and state. Messengers to the 1982 convention endorsed that resolution, over the objections of James Dunn, a leader among Texas Baptists who worked with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs at the time.[54]

Dunn, of course, had already been fighting for the separation of church and state for many years. While he acknowledged that "there is legitimate honest room for difference of opinion among people who honestly believe in separation of church and state," he was also adamant that it remain a bedrock of Baptist

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[53]Hankins, 146.
[54]Ibid.

belief and practice.[55] He had already taken a hard stance against any blurring of that separation in public schools, whether through publicly-financed church academies or organized prayer. To him, they were both "if not absolutely unconstitutional---that's not basically our prerogative to decide anyway---if not absolutely unconstitutional, a violation of separation of church and state."[56] His passion for defending separation in all cases placed him and other Texas Baptist leaders in conflict with the fundamentalists gaining power in the national convention.

Dunn also suspected that the Reagan administration was behind the prayer amendment and said so later. Despite Southern Baptists' official support for the amendment, it failed to achieve the required two-thirds majority in the Senate, and it never became law. But the moment marked a profound shift for the Southern Baptist Convention. From that point on, the denomination would be supportive of organized prayer in public schools. In 1992 the denomination adopted its most far-reaching resolution endorsing such organized prayer and framed the issue not as a problem of the establishment of religion, but rather as an issue of free speech, with students being denied their rights. The resolution "solidified the shift in the SBC from its separationist leaders" and formalized the growing Baptist sense that the school prayer issue was "a free-exercise right, not an establishment problem."[57] For Texas Baptist leaders, this shift could not have been more troubling. To them, it represented a break with Baptist tradition that

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[55]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 13 June 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 138.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Hankins, 146.

might have been politically expedient but did not meet the standards of their faith. More than any other issue, the debate over school prayer demonstrated how far the denomination had moved from its roots and how isolated Texas Baptists were in the new political and religious landscape of their denomination.

Foy Valentine insisted that the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC, particularly the push to align the denomination with conservative and Republican politics, was detrimental to Baptists' religious witness. "When they first got together, Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson, they perceived that with ten votes from each church and precinct politics, it wouldn't be too hard" (to gain control of the convention).[58] Once they started to gain control, his first thought was "that utter ruin was in the future for the convention as we have known it."[59] His expectations for the fundamentalists were exceedingly low: "I don't think any of us had any feeling that Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler and Adrien Rogers would lead us to a great statesmanlike vision of what we could do for God . . . I think that was simply not something that we expected to happen."[60] He met frequently with Abner McCall, who was president of Baylor University in the 1970s and 1980s. Along with other Texas Baptist leaders, they worked to rally moderate Baptists to oppose the fundamentalist takeover, but with little success. They "would talk about the need for being organized to do something about it," but rarely succeeded in organizing political opposition. "We would get all the agency people together and make our speeches, and they would declare, Yeah,

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[58]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton (Texas Baptist Project, May 22, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 52.
[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid., 53.

it's serious," he remembered. But ultimately, they "would go home and back right out" and accomplish very little in terms of organizing.[61]

Valentine explained the lack of organization by moderate Baptists this way: "They dreaded a fight. They didn't think that there would be any way the pendulum wouldn't swing back, and they would protect their perquisites, not make anybody mad, except those of us who were crying Wolf! Wolf!"[62] The end result was a complete takeover of the convention and, in Valentine's mind, a real loss of Baptist identity. "I think we perceived the ruin to be essentially what has unfolded," he remembered. "A following of an agenda foreign to our best Baptist insights, an agenda that rejected some of our historic commitments, such as separation of church and state."[63] Although Valentine and others remained active in their local work and particular Baptist agencies, they recognized that they lost the battle for control of the convention.

As with other religious and political issues, the debate over fundamentalism in the SBC prompted a certain defensiveness from Texas Baptists about the nature of Baptist institutions. Much of this conflict centered on two of Texas Baptists' most cherished establishments: Southwestern Theological Seminary and Baylor University. Located in Fort Worth, Texas, and founded in 1908, Southwestern had over 4,000 members by 1985, making it one of the largest seminaries in the world. Baylor University was located in Waco, Texas, and was the largest Baptist university in the world. Texas Baptists were closely

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[61]Ibid.
[62]Ibid.
[63]Ibid.

affiliated with both schools.[64] Fundamentalist leaders began to target Baptist seminaries and colleges in the 1970s, and a 1980 controversy brought the issue to a head in Texas Baptist life. In response to Paige Patterson's insistence that certain employees at Baptist institutions "are not faithful to historic Baptist belief," the *Standard* published a challenge asking Patterson to produce names. Patterson gladly responded by identifying six college and seminary professors he believed were "representative of the problem." Of the six professors' named, one taught at Southwestern Seminary and another taught at Baylor University. The nature of Patterson's complaints was theological: he criticized them for refusing to endorse the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.[65] By the late 1970s and early 1980s, fundamentalists routinely questioned the theological conservatism of political opponents, insisting that the denomination was filled with liberals of one stripe or another. But Russell Dilday, president of Southwestern Seminary, was having none of it and offered a quick and robust defense of the professors. "These are committed teachers, underpaid for the most part, who do not deserve blanket accusations," he insisted. "They are individuals, dedicated to their task and to the Lord and not only are they Bible-believing teachers, they go beyond that to the important step of yielding to the Bible as authoritative, obeying it, following it, applying it."[66]

Like many Baptist moderates, Dilday emphasized the distracting nature of theological controversies from evangelism, which he believed should be the main

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[64]"Editorial: The Situation at Southwestern Seminary," *Baptist Standard*, 27 March 1985.
[65]Toby Druin, "Patterson, Seven Accused Exchange Charges," *The Baptist Standard*, 14 May 1980, 5.
[66]"Presidents Respond to Critics, Affirm Bible," *Baptist Standard*, May 30, 1979, 4.

focus of the convention's efforts. "It seems to me that when the world is lost and going to eternal hell, it is not time to be dividing our purposes as a convention, not time to be out in manipulating, political meetings of various kinds. It's time to give ourselves to the main thrust," he argued. His comment about "manipulating, political meetings" was an unmistakable reference to the meetings preceding the 1979 Houston convention, at which fundamentalists plotted the election of Adrien Rogers.[67] To Dilday and other moderates, the issue was one of institutional control, and fundamentalists were simply using charges of liberalism to gain power in the SBC. Following Dilday's comments, which were accompanied by similar defenses from the other five presidents of Southern Baptist seminaries, Patterson issued a statement welcoming their comments. Describing himself as "thrilled beyond any possible way of expressing it," he described his gratitude that "the six seminary presidents have reaffirmed their full faith in the infallibility and the inerrancy of the scripture and that they assure us this is true of their faculties also."[68] But the issue was clearly not going away, and fundamentalists' increasing control over the convention after 1979 would bring even more conflict between Patterson's faction and their moderate opponents.

During the 1980 seminary controversy, Texas Baptist took a stand on the side of the moderates. The *Standard* came to the quick defense of the professors and agreed with Dilday's charge that Patterson was using the allegations to gain control of the convention. A heated editorial blasted Patterson for forming a "group that has the makings of a political party that smacks of an attempt to take

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[67]Ibid.
[68]"Conferences Set; Patterson Lauds Presidents' Stand," *Baptist Standard*, May 30, 1979, 4.

over the convention." The editorial attacked Patterson and his allies for implying that they were the ones best suited to interpret Baptist doctrine and warned that the BGCT would not support any effort by Patterson's group to control the convention. It also noted that the charges of theological liberalism were unfounded. In fact, every professor Patterson named had previously affirmed traditional Baptist beliefs like the bodily resurrection of Christ and the authority of the Bible.[69] Patterson subsequently replied to the editorial, saying that "the possibility of political parties" was only the result of "believers in a trustworthy Bible being continually ignored."[70] The dispute between Patterson and the editors of the *Standard* was another indication that Texas Baptists were willing to defend the integrity of Baptist institutions against the attacks of Patterson and his fundamentalist allies. It also placed them squarely on the moderate side of the Baptist wars, which would bring them into conflict with the Christian Right.

By 1985, fundamentalists had consolidated control of the Southern Baptist Convention, and moderates were grappling with whether they would ever feel at home in their own denomination. The controversy at Southwestern Seminary had not abated following the rift between Patterson and Dilday in the early 1980s; instead, it had escalated. The board of trustees for the institution still included many of Dilday's supporters, but it was increasingly filled with members of Patterson's camp who determined that the seminary had become too liberal and sought steps to enforce a more doctrinaire form of theological conservatism. For his part, Dilday refused to back down from his vocal stance against Patterson's

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[69]"Editorial: Patterson Charges Dangerous," *The Baptist Standard*, 23 April 1980, 6.
[70]"Patterson Replies to Concerns of Editor," *The Baptist Standard*, 14 May 1980, 4.

attempts to control the denomination politically (or, as Patterson might have stated it, to return the SBC to its conservative roots). Dilday's activism on the issue had become so controversial that some of the Southwestern trustees sought a resolution forbidding him from speaking out publicly on the denominational schism. Although the motion was tabled, editors at the *Baptist Standard,* who were supportive of Dilday's efforts, noted that his "leadership had been challenged and left somewhat tarnished."[71] The faculty at Southwestern Seminary followed with a special meeting and a statement expressing support for Dilday's right to speak freely about the "real and serious danger" that Patterson's faction posed to the seminary and the SBC.[72] Although Dilday still had the support of his faculty, the denomination and Southwestern's board of trustees were clearly moving in the direction of Patterson and the fundamentalists.

If the Houston convention in 1979 was the moment when fundamentalists first gained a foothold in controlling the denomination, the 1985 convention in Dallas was the moment that control was solidified. Charles Stanley, a Patterson ally and leader within the fundamentalist camp, was running for re-election as president of the convention, and moderates launched a serious campaign to defeat him. The moderate candidate was a Texas Baptist, Winfred Moore, a man who most saw as "equally conservative" on theological issues as Stanley. Pastor of Amarillo Baptist Church for many years, he was a vocal moderate in Baptist politics and held great respect from his fellow Texas Baptists, who had elected him president of their state convention in 1983. Moore had spoken against

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[71]"Editorial: The Situation at Southwestern Seminary," *Baptist Standard*, March 27, 1985, 6.
[72]Ibid.

Patterson's faction for years, warning that the denomination was becoming too narrow in its theology. He had also advocated against the growing involvement with partisan politics, especially the alliance between Southern Baptists and the Republican Party.[73] But he was a clear theological conservative; the difference between him and Stanley lay in the two men's vision of the "value and limits of diversity in an admittedly conservative denomination. Moore was convinced that differing views on scripture and its interpretation could be tolerated so long as cooperation and mission support was maintained."[74] Stanley, for his part, "was equally convinced that such toleration was dangerous to the denomination's future."[75]

For better or worse, both sides understood the significance of the convention. If Stanley won, fundamentalists would be able to strengthen their control of denominational agencies and force moderates to win at least five consecutive presidential elections to re-gain power, something both sides realized was highly unlikely. The fundamentalist side drew support from leaders of the Christian Right, which by 1985 had emerged as one of the most powerful political forces in Reagan's America. Pat Robertson, host of the 700 Club and eventual founder of the Christian Coalition, hosted a forum with leaders of the fundamentalist side. He provided airtime for Adrien Rogers, Bailey Smith, and other members of the Patterson faction to cite examples of what they believed were doctrinal heresies by Southern Baptists administrators, pastors, and

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[73]"Texas Baptists Elect Pastor," *The New York Times*, Final Edition, November 3, 1983, 26. For more information about his life and work in the BGCT and SBC, see Ferrell Foster, "Winfred Moore Honored as 'Elder Statesman,'" Baptist General Convention of Texas website http://www.bgct.org/texasbaptists/Page.aspx?&pid= 870& srcid=1887.
[74]Ammerman, 4.
[75]Ibid.

professors. Occurring as it did in the run-up to the Dallas convention, speakers on the program campaigned openly for Charles Stanley, emphasizing the importance of his election to their cause. Jerry Falwell also spoke openly of his support for Stanley and encouraged his followers who were also Southern Baptists to cast their votes for him.[76] In short, the battle between Charles Stanley and Winfred Moore was to be the climax of the denominational struggle between fundamentalists and moderates.

Leading up to the convention, both sides staked their terrain in the pages of *The Theological Educator*, a publication of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Patterson reiterated claims that he had been making since at least the mid-1970s, namely that professors at Southern Baptist seminaries and colleges had drifted towards liberalism and deserved to be chastised by the denomination at large. Recalling his own seminary education, he insisted that "some of the doctrinal truths I had been taught to hold precious were not only debunked but ridiculed . . . the fires of evangelism and the fervency of heart were often doused with the condescending remark of a lofty academe."[77] After recalling his own personal experience, Patterson proceeded to cite examples of professors who had expressed views that struck him as theologically liberal. For example, a faculty member at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, admonished students to consider the writings of the Old Testament "as they were intended, as a person living two and a half millennia ago, prior to the modern, scientific era" might have considered them. The faculty member, Roy Lee

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[76]Ibid, 184.
[77]Paige Patterson, "Stalemate," *The Theological Educator*, 1985, 3.

Honeycutt, was referencing a story from the book of Second Kings in which the prophet Elisha reportedly brought a child back to life. Honeycutt wrote, "That this is most likely a wonder story in the category of saga and legend is probable; even so, that the story should be weakened by rationalistic explanations is to miss the point of the redactor's purpose."[78] While Honeycutt's comments were uncontroversial from a historical perspective, to Patterson they represented the kind of theological heresy that was worthy of a full-on denominational battle. Although he continued to have reservations, he acknowledged "for the first time" the possibility "of a formal split," claiming it was "due to the challenge to Dr. Stanley's reelection and the declaration of 'holy war' being made" by presidents of Baptist seminaries. Ultimately, he concluded that conservatives had to draw a line in the sand and to "insist that employees of the convention never, under any circumstances, call into question any statement of the Bible or say anything that might be construed as disbelief in the veracity of the Scriptures."[79] In defining theological conservatism in such a narrow way (even many conservatives did not take every statement of the Bible to be literally or historically true), Patterson seemed to make reconciliation with moderates almost impossible. His statements, coming as they did just before the Dallas convention, set the tone for a tumultuous battle.

For his part, Russell Dilday continued to maintain that Patterson's charges were false and that he was using them in service of a larger agenda for control of the convention. He called the Patterson faction a "political machine" that was

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[78]Ibid.
[79]Ibid.

"carried forward by emotional momentum in spite of the fact that Southern Baptists, including our agency leaders, are practically unanimous in their belief in biblical authority and conservative theology."[80] He once again insisted that the split was not theological in nature, but was simply a debate about whether or not Baptist institutions should be supported and sustained. Dilday maintained that moderates were simply Baptists who were "equally conservative theologically, just as serious in their commitment to the infallibility of God's word . . . but who have at the same time a proven record of enthusiastic support for convention causes. They are unapologetically Southern Baptist."[81] Like Patterson, he was adamant about the importance of the Dallas convention, saying "There is no 'in-between' group, for neutrality on these questions is not a viable option. The choices facing messengers at upcoming conventions are clear. Their votes will determine what kind of convention we will be."[82]

Dilday also emphasized the fact that the fundamentalist faction was closely aligned with the movement of religious conservatives known then and now as the Christian Right. Labeling fundamentalist leaders "Falwellian," he attacked them for being more concerned with "Moral Majority political agendas" than with traditional Baptist emphases like missions and evangelism.[83] His labeling of fundamentalists as "Falwellian" was indicative of an important fact about Texas Baptists: They were naturally skeptical of leaders of the Christian Right like Jerry Falwell. To be sure, Texas Baptists' resistance to Christian Right

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[80]Russel Dilday, "My Interpretation of the Controversy and My Hope for the Convention," *The Theological Educator*, 1985, 29.
[81]Ibid.
[82]Ibid.
[83]Ibid.

politics was grounded in their support for the separation of church and state. But the open support of Falwell and Pat Robertson for the fundamentalist side in the Southern Baptist controversies of the late 1970s and early 1980s cemented a deep skepticism among Texas Baptists about the goodwill of Christian Right leaders.

Foy Valentine agreed with Dilday that the overt affiliation of the fundamentalist side with Republican politics was a negative development for the Baptist convention. He recalled hearing George H. W. Bush, Reagan's vice president during his two terms in office, address a convention of Southern Baptists. "He spouted the most radical right-wing stuff imaginable at a pastors' conference," Valentine recalled.[84] To Valentine, Southern Baptists' proximity to political power in the Reagan years did not benefit the denomination: "I don't think Southern Baptist have affected Washington much. I think Washington has affected Southern Baptists a great deal."[85] He also maintained that both Baptist fundamentalists and Christian Right leaders overstated their own influence on national politics. As an example, he cited Pat Robertson's 1988 run for the Republican presidential nomination.[86] "Pat Robertson was telling everybody how influential he was, how he could turn hurricanes around, how he had access to the White House, and how he was going to run it for the glory of God," Valentine said.[87]Ultimately, though, Robertson's forces did not show up at the ballot box

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[84]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton (Texas Baptist Project, May 22, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 54.
[85]Ibid.
[86]For more on Robertson' 1988 run, see Duane Murray Oldfield, *The Right and the Righteous: The Christian Right Confronts the Republican Party* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).
[87]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton (Texas Baptist Project, May 22, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 55.

the way he expected them to: "When the elections took place, the primaries had started really taking place where those troops were supposed to come out; they didn't come. I didn't ever think they were coming."[88] To Valentine, the growing association of the SBC with Robertson's style of Republican politics was something worth fighting. Even if he was on the losing side (at least in terms of denominational politics), he believed opposing fundamentalist influence was the right thing to do.

With both sides acknowledging the significance of the race between Charles Stanley and Winfred Moore for president of the SBC, Baptists gathered in Dallas in June 1985. The convention was more raucous than usual, with both sides organizing their troops, plotting strategies, and wondering if any sort of reconciliation was possible. On Tuesday of the convention, delegates learned that Charles Stanley had narrowly won reelection as president. His supporters cheered wildly, while moderates looked on in silence. Following the presidential election, messengers nominated Moore to run as vice-president, hoping that it would provide a pathway to reconciliation. Moore agreed, and he easily defeated the fundamentalist candidate for vice-president, Zig Ziglar. But within a year, he would complain that the fundamentalist leadership ignored his advice on nominations, just as they had done to previous moderate vice-presidents. Although moderates hoped to fight the battle at future conventions, in retrospect, the 1985 convention was their last serious chance to defeat the fundamentalists and retake some control over the convention. By 1988, nearly every denominational board of trustees would be dominated by fundamentalists, and

[88]Ibid.

moderates would be relegated to also-ran status in a denomination they had once controlled.[89]

For Texas Baptists, the conflict between Baptist moderates and fundamentalists was a formative political experience and not one that endeared them to the alliance between the Southern Baptist Convention and the Christian Right. Throughout the 1980s and beyond, Patterson and his allies would move the convention further right politically, passing resolution after resolution on issues like abortion and school prayer that would have been unthinkable in the 1960s or early 1970s. In short, Texas Baptists supported the losing side of a denominational war that reshaped southern religion and politics. They did so out of a deep commitment to the historic Baptist principle of separation of church and state, one they never really abandoned. By the early 1990s, the Baptist General Convention of Texas was embroiled in the same controversies that had already split the national convention. With the victory of fundamentalists at the national level, Texas Baptist leaders feared a similar occurrence in their state convention. Professors and administrators from Texas Baptist colleges and universities worried about a fundamentalist power grab that could change their schools or even result in their firing. A group of concerned Texas Baptists formed Texas Baptists Committed, an organization dedicated to preventing Patterson's supporters from gaining power in the BGCT. Although it took several contentious meetings, the group was victorious and moderates retained control over the state convention, prompting a minority of fundamentalist Texas Baptists to start their

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[89]Ammerman, 4.

own organization.[90]

To understand why Texas Baptist leaders rejected an alliance with the Christian Right, historians must contend with their role in the denominational controversy that dominated Southern Baptist life in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As fundamentalist leaders aligned with the Christian Right, they also attacked the integrity of Baptist institutions, offended the sensibilities of unity-oriented Baptists, and annoyed Texas Baptist leaders who believed their cries of heresy were political manipulations. In grabbing for power at the national level, fundamentalists made enemies of many Texas Baptists, who were inclined to defend Baptist institutions and whose experiences with those institutions were almost uniformly positive. But beyond the personalities and disputes that animated these controversies, Texas Baptists held fundamental beliefs about the separation of church and state that led them to be skeptical of Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, and the fundamentalist faction in Southern Baptist politics. That Baptist fundamentalists sought and received support from Christian Right leaders and seemed contemptuous of church/state separation only added fuel to the fire. By the mid-1980s, it was clear that Texas Baptists were on the losing side of the Baptist holy wars. But it was equally clear that they would not join other state conventions in supporting Christian Right causes, agitating for an expressly political agenda, or abandoning their traditional devotion to the separation of church and state.

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[90]Rick McClatchy, "The Texas Two-Step" in Carl L. Kell, ed., *Exiled: Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

Chapter 4

A Baptist Woman's Place: Texas Baptists and Gender Controversies, 1960-1985

In 1973, following the Supreme Court's *Roe vs. Wade* ruling legalizing abortion, a number of US representatives and senators pushed for legislation that would allow federally-funded hospitals to refuse abortions because of religious or moral concerns. James E. Wood, Jr., a professor at Baylor University and a prominent Texas Baptist, condemned the efforts, saying they raised "serious questions" about the "viability of the First Amendment."[1] To him, the issue was not whether abortion was religiously justified, but whether or not government-funded hospitals could refuse "to perform medical services declared to be legal by the U.S. Supreme Court."[2] He went further: "Regardless of one's own moral or religious views on abortion, the legislation cited here must be viewed as incompatible with the American tradition of public control and public interest as a necessary accompaniment to the appropriation of public funds." He labeled the legislation "a violation of the separation of church and state" and noted that "the abortion decision by the Supreme Court may be regarded as generally compatible with the positions taken by some of the major religious denominations of America."[3] Woods was no casual observer: He served as the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the political

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[1]"Wood Criticizes Abortion Bill," *Baptist Standard*, July 25, 1973, 4.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid.

advocacy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

Contemporary observers might be surprised to learn that an influential Texas Baptist held pro-choice views or that someone with such opinions could hold high office in the SBC. But the early reaction of Southern Baptists to the *Roe* decision was not nearly as critical as contemporary politics would suggest. A significant portion of Baptists viewed abortion not as a hot-button political issue but as an ethical one with profound implications for the role of government in private religion. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Texas Baptist leaders were mostly skeptical of anti-abortion politics, particularly when the abortion issue clouded out other concerns. As with other political issues, their concern for protecting the separation of church and state was overriding, and it led them to question the wisdom of a crusade against legal abortion. Years before the Christian Right reshaped the landscape of abortion politics, Texas Baptists articulated a vision of abortion as a private moral issue, not one that warranted political advocacy or much government intervention.

The abortion issue is just one example of a surprising trend: Texas Baptists handled issues of gender and sexuality in a much more moderate fashion than the national leadership of the SBC, particularly the fundamentalists who took control after 1979. The question of women in ministry became hugely controversial during the 1970s, splitting apart churches, dividing seminary students, and (in some cases) leading to conflict between wives and husbands. After 1979, the SBC leadership made opposition to women ministers a focal point of denominational politics and Baptist theology. Even today, Southern Baptist

leaders discuss the increasing occurrence of women ministers in terms of what they see as a broader assault on traditional gender roles. But Texas Baptists in the 1970s and 1980s were more progressive on the issue than Baptist leaders today. That is certainly not to say that Texas Baptists were unanimous in supporting women ministers, or even that most of them supported it. But it is clear that the state leadership either favored women in ministry or believed it was not important enough of an issue to divide the convention. Where their fundamentalist counterparts would insist on opposition to women ministers as a theological litmus test, Texas Baptists were quite content to let individual Baptists and local congregations sort out the issue for themselves. This moderation on questions of gender placed Texas Baptists on the opposite side of the staunch conservatives who came to lead the SBC; it also placed them in opposition to leaders of the Christian Right, who began organizing an entire political movement around opposition to any new understandings of gender or sexuality.[4]

Observers of Southern Baptist politics in recent years are often quite surprised to learn that the denomination was one of the first in the country to offer political cover for pro-choice activists by supporting liberalization of the country's abortion laws. At the SBC's annual meeting in 1971, messengers (as delegates to the convention were called) met in St. Louis to determine the convention's official position on a range of controversial issues, including the topic of abortion, which was becoming a potent national issue at the time. After a floor debate (not

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[4]For more information on the Christian Right and the issue of abortion, see William Martin, *With God On Our Side* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 154-180; for more on the Christian Right and gender issues, see Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian* Right (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 105-132.

unusual for any issue at a Baptist convention), the SBC passed a resolution supporting federal legislation that "will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of fetal deformity and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother."[5] The language of the resolution was striking, particularly its insistence that abortion should be allowed even in cases where the woman's physical health was not threatened by a pregnancy, but her emotional or mental state might be. Certainly, that statement did not place Southern Baptists on the left end of the spectrum on reproductive issues, and it left room for much disagreement with the feminist push for wholesale liberalization. But it was a decidedly moderate statement by a conservative denomination that became crucial to the anti-abortion coalition in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Even before the *Roe* decision brought abortion politics to the forefront of national debates, prominent Texas Baptists had indicated that a moderate response to the issue was in keeping with Baptist values. Dan McGee, a professor of religion at Baylor University, gave an address on the issue to the Baptist Student Union of Baylor in 1971, outlining what he saw as an appropriate Baptist outlook on abortion. He insisted that concern for "potential life" must be balanced against other considerations. "Rhetorically, how do we balance off our commitments to the protection of fetal life to our loyalty to other members of society?" he wondered. In no way did he deny the concern many Baptists had for protecting fetal life. "Our evaluation of human life is reflected in our own value of

[5]"Southern Baptist Convention: Abortion Resolution Passes," *Baptist Standard*, June 9, 1971, 9.

fetal life because it symbolizes human life to us, and because the fetus also has potential for human life," he said. No one could accuse McGee of being a rabid defender of "abortion-on-demand," the catch phrase that was becoming a popular line of attack against feminists in the 1970s. But he also favored an approach that considered the impact of abortion laws on women and gave doctors the maximum flexibility in dealing with the issue. He offered support for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which argued that exceptions for the health of the mother should not be limited to her physical condition but should also include her emotional well being. Overall, McGee endorsed a holistic approach to the issue that gave strong consideration to the impact of abortion laws on women: "A realized life will not be sacrificed for just potential life," he insisted.[6] His support for abortion rights was qualified, and his position on the issue was decidedly moderate. But his willingness to consider women's health and his insistence that the debate should extend beyond "just potential life" placed him in opposition to the rigid position on abortion rights that characterized the Christian Right in the late1970s and 1980s.

The Southern Baptist Convention went on record as favoring some form of legal abortion in 1971, but it was not until 1973 that the issue of abortion rights truly became a dominant one in national politics. That year, of course, the Supreme Court's *Roe vs. Wade* ruling prevented states from banning abortion for most reasons in the first trimester, allowing for legal abortion across the country.[7] Although the SBC would eventually become a staunch opponent of abortion

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[6]"Human Life Said Abortion Question," *Baptist Standard*, March 17, 1971, 8.
[7]"Excerpts from Abortion Case," *New York Times*, January 23, 1973, 20. See also, M. A. Farber, "Abortions at Any Time Sought in State," *New York Times*, January 24, 1973, 13.

rights, the initial reaction from Southern Baptist leaders was not especially conservative. Texas Baptists, in particular, stood out for their moderation. James Wood led the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs' opposition to amending the constitution to restrict abortion. Conservative congressmen were already circulating plans for an amendment that would grant full constitutional rights to "unborn offspring at every stage of their biological development." At Wood's behest, the Committee voted to oppose to such measures at its semi-annual meeting in December 1973. Wood emphasized that the resolution was not in support of the practice of abortion but simply an affirmation of "civil liberties and religious freedom" for individuals as they determined their response to the issue.[8] Wood's tendency to view the issue in terms of religious liberty and the separation of church and state was typical of Texas Baptist leaders in the early 1970s. But their views on the subject would eventually be drowned out by the more rabid response of other elements of the SBC.

The pro-choice tendencies of Texas Baptist leaders would eventually give way to the stridently anti-choice views of fundamentalists like Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, who seized power in the convention in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But as late as 1974 the pro-choice views of Texas Baptists were in step with the national SBC. At the convention's annual meeting, conservatives proposed a resolution opposing all abortions, without exceptions for rape, incest, or the life and health of the mother. That resolution lost by a wide margin, an indication that at least in 1974, a more moderate view of the issue was dominant in Southern Baptist circles. After losing the resolution banning all abortions,

[8]"Baptist Joint Committee: Abortion Proposal Opposed," *Baptist Standard*, October 10, 1973, 5.

conservatives tried to repeal the 1971 resolution, which had endorsed legislation that would allow for abortion "under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of fetal deformity," and a threat to the woman's life or health. But messengers reaffirmed that stance by a wide margin, ending fundamentalist hopes of making the convention a vehicle for anti-abortion politics, at least for the time being.[9] By the mid-1980s Texas Baptist leaders would be moderate outliers in a convention that had become extremely conservative on reproductive issues, in both its official proclamations and its chosen leadership. But it is important to recall that the convention's ultimate anti-choice stance was the result of a protracted struggle between two visions of Baptist politics, not the foregone result of Baptist theology. Indeed, it was Baptist history and belief, particularly regarding the separation of church and state, that led Baptist moderates to oppose universal restrictions on abortion in the early years of the abortion wars.

One of the most influential Texas Baptists who articulated a moderate stance on the issue of abortion was Foy Valentine. Valentine had served as director of the Texas Christian Life Commission from 1953 to1960, and he was the director of the national Christian Life Commission for Southern Baptists throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. In that role, he witnessed the early mobilization of anti-abortion forces and their impact on Baptist politics. To his mind, the issue was always more of a Roman Catholic one than a Baptist one, at least politically, and he did not remember it being a significant debate among Baptists until the 1970s. "The subject didn't even surface until about 1970," he recalls. "Now, the Roman Catholic bishops started pressing on this stuff early in

[9]"Convention: Reaffirms Abortion Stand," *Baptist Standard*, June 19, 1974, 4.

the forties. They were pressing a little more in the fifties, into the sixties they were pressing. Not until the bishops had worked at it for decades did they politicize the issue enough to get it into the thinking of some of our people."[10] For Valentine, the decision to bring the abortion debate into the political realm (and to insist on using the law to ban the procedure) was a Roman Catholic one that Southern Baptists should be careful not to emulate. "Our response to the challenges related to abortion should not be based on Roman Catholic dogma, or the pope's notion as to when life began, or ensoulment, or any of the old doctrines from Augustine to Aquinas," he insisted. Instead, "it should be based on theological and psychological truth, our convictions about it."[11] Anti-abortion politics came to unite evangelicals and Catholics in the 1980s, but at the time of *Roe* the two groups were still quite divided over theological and, sometimes, political issues. Valentine's reluctance to embrace what he saw as a Catholic political agenda was not unique among Southern Baptists, particularly those in Texas.

Although Valentine resented the fact that Catholics originally pushed the issue and found the politicization of abortion distasteful, his views on the subject were in no way liberal. As with most other social or political issues, moderate Baptists like Valentine were broadly conservative in their outlook. But they resented the all-or-nothing attitude about abortion that Christian Right activists pushed, and they questioned the wisdom of pursuing an exclusively political strategy on an issue that for them held private religious significance. He summed up his position this way: "Abortion is not a satisfactory or morally justified way of

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[10]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 10 August 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 125.
[11]Ibid.

birth control." Yet he continued, "We should accept it as the least objectionable, lesser of available evils, in cases of rape, incest, manifest deformity to the life of the fetus, or clear danger to the physical or mental life of the mother."[12] In other words, he supported the original position of the Southern Baptist Convention. Fundamentalists Baptists would eventually tar Valentine and others with the "liberal" label because they supported abortion rights in some instances, but that says more about the conservative direction of the denomination than it does about the position itself. Valentine's stance was easily within the bounds of political conservatism in the 1970s and beyond.[13]

In his views on reproductive issues, Valentine also split with Christian Right leaders in emphasizing sexual education as part of a strategy to reduce unwanted pregnancies and inform teenagers about the consequences of promiscuity. Specifically, he felt that Baptist churches should include programs of sexual education as part of their curriculums for young people. "We need to start with responsible Christian sex education," he stated. "I don't think we should take sex lightly, and that's the reason I had much rather we be talking about not committing adultery than not committing abortion."[14] His support for such programs was clearly not based in any desire to advance an agenda of sexual liberation. He was adamant that "the sexual revolution has resulted in an incredible increase in unfaithfulness, premarital sex, unchastity, all sorts of

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[12]Ibid., 126.
[13]For more on Baptist moderates and liberalism (specifically, their rejection of it), see Walter B. Shurden, *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993).
[14]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 10 August 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 128.

problems that sort of surround the abortion concerns that we have."[15]

In short, Valentine was concerned about the problems he felt were inherent to sexual freedom, but he tended to favor a solutions-based approach as opposed to the rigid political stance of Baptist fundamentalists. He took a great deal of heat from those fundamentalists for his stance in favor of what he called "Christian sexual education." He made little progress towards that goal: " . . . though we have made some halting steps in that direction, we never go very far with it because the extremists are always at the door yapping and howling and snarling and biting to keep any sex education from happening. No matter how carefully it may be proposed or done, they will find ways to kill it or stop it wherever they can."[16] As one of the primary spokespersons for Texas Baptists and the moderate Baptist camp, Valentine clashed often with fundamentalist Baptists over reproductive issues. By 1980 he had become a lighting rod of sorts and a clear political enemy of fundamentalist Baptists. But it is always important to bear in mind that he was no activist on the pro-choice side, nor was he particularly enthralled with "the sexual revolution," as he always called it. Instead, he was one of a dying breed: Baptist moderates who were uncomfortable with many of the sexual changes that gripped America after 1960, but who preferred a measured response that emphasized Baptist self-improvement over robust political agitation.[17]

It was Valentine's response to the 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision that

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[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid., 127.
[17]For more on Valentine's status as an enemy of Baptist fundamentalists, see Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 171.

cemented his reputation as an opponent of the Christian Right and Baptist fundamentalists. At the time, he served as executive director of the Christian Life Commission, the national Baptist agency responsible for dealing with major social issues. After the fact, he described the strategy that made him a major enemy of anti-abortion forces: "We sought to resist the extremist right-wing forces that sought to use Christians in general, and Baptists in particular, for their political ends, and made abortion their rallying cry."[18] He was particularly contemptuous of Jerry Falwell, who by the mid-1970s was a leading spokesperson for the Christian Right (and a leading critic of Baptist moderates).[19] "We sought to resist people like Jerry Falwell, who was wont to wear a gold fetus in his lapel, as a symbol of his concern about it."[20] Besides Falwell, Valentine also reserved special scorn for Francis Schaeffer, one of the earliest advocates for an anti-abortion political agenda and a leader among politically motivated evangelicals.[21] "We sought to resist Francis Schaeffer, the daddy rabbit of the present right-wing fundamentalists, who, as a former associate of Carl McIntire's little one-eyed fundamentalist school in Pennsylvania, his only formal education, was pressing for a constitutional amendment."[22] He could not disguise his contempt for such leaders, and his refusal to endorse a constitutional amendment banning all abortion was at the heart of his differences with

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[18]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 10 August 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 128.
[19]For more on Falwell's rise as a leader of the Christian Right, see Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 191-220; and Williams, *God's Own Party*, 33-45.
[20]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 10 August 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 128.
[21]For more on Francis Schaeffer and the abortion issue, see Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 155-161.
[22]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 10 August 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 128.

fundamentalist Baptists. Besides his disagreements with pro-lifers over sexual education and the legality of abortion in some cases, Valentine also rejected the near-exclusive focus on abortion of some members of the Christian Right who "wanted us to be dealing with this issue above all others. The anti-abortionists" he continued, "are simply a one-theme people who would like to see us doing nothing about hunger or race relations or citizenship or separation of church and state or morality or hardly anything else, just as long as we were talking about their accepted belief that life in its full human form begins at the moment of conception, and, therefore, all abortion, even if it kills the mother, is unacceptable and must be rejected."[23]

One interesting aspect of Valentine's opposition to the fundamentalist position on abortion is that he thought it too similar to the one coming from the Pope in Rome and driving Catholic reaction to the issue. In 1981 he authored a pamphlet in which he insisted that, "It is questionable that Christian love and justice would be served by extremely restrictive laws which do not give conscientious people with proper medical advice the opportunity to choose when they are faced with very grave moral dilemmas related to abortion."[24] He argued this while condemning "the casual use of abortion as a means of birth control, a situation that is socially irresponsible and morally indefensible."[25] If he viewed most abortions in such negative terms, why did Valentine also resist a move to criminalize most abortions? The answer is complicated, but it begins with his resistance to what he saw as the Catholic way of practicing politics. By the time

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[23]Ibid.
[24]Hankins, *Uneasy in* Babylon,171.
[25] Ibid.

the abortion debate began to dominate national politics, he had spent years advocating against Catholic resistance to church/state separation and insisting that Baptists should zealously guard against any intrusions by the state into religious life. For him, Baptist responses to the abortion issue should not reflect dictates from Rome. When speaking about the increasing prevalence of abortion, he cautioned, "Christians may properly work to change this situation without moving to the other extreme and insisting that the whole nation be required to accept Roman Catholic dogma related to abortion under the law of the land."[26] In 1985 he went further, arguing that Baptists should never be "willing to shape public policy to the demands of the Roman Catholic bishops."[27]

James Dunn was another influential Texas Baptist who pressed for a moderate response to the abortion question. He served as head of the Texas Christian Life Commission from 1968 to 1980, when he became executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. He used both these perches to battle what he saw as an overzealous response to abortion from the fundamentalist camp. At the 1974 annual meeting of the SBC, he spoke in favor of the resolution affirming the right of women to choose abortion in some circumstances. Following the adoption of that policy, he also noted his pride that the convention "overwhelmingly" rejected "an abortion-is-murder resolution" with "at the most, 5 percent who voted to support" it.[28] He was especially pleased that the Southern Baptist Convention went "overwhelmingly on record with a rather

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[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid., 172.
[28]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by H. Wayne Pipkin (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 13 June 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 31.

open position on abortion. And it's probably good that these guys brought it up, so we could take this position and make it clear that the convention is not a conservative denomination on the abortion issue, as we are so often labeled."[29] Like most other Baptist moderates, he refused to support what he called "abortion on demand," but he insisted upon legal abortion "in instances of rape, incest, clear evidence of fetal deformity, or clearly ascertained indication of damage to the physical, mental, or emotional health of the mother" (Again, the exact position moderates successfully pushed the convention to adopt).[30] His call for "reject(ing) the extremes of abortion on demand or abortion is murder under all circumstances"[31] was perfectly in tune with the national convention in the mid-1970s, but it was out of step with the fundamentalist crusade to ban all abortions that would eventually characterize the SBC's position on the issue. His moderate voice on the abortion issue was another example of the growing divergence between the emerging movement of Christian Right activists and Texas Baptists.

The moderation of Texas Baptists on the issue stood in stark contrast to the rhetoric of fundamentalists who battled them for power in the convention in the 1970s and took firm control in the 1980s. In Nancy Ammerman's polling of Southern Baptists in the 1980s, 63 percent supported restricting abortion to only cases in which the mother's life was threatened, and one-third actually opposed abortion in every single circumstance. Fundamentalist leaders were particularly brazen in their statements on abortion. Bailey Smith, a leading conservative voice whom fundamentalists helped elect president of the convention in the mid-

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[29]Ibid, 32. For more on SBC resolutions on abortion, see Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 181-184.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.

1980s, put it this way: "I want to say to every supreme court justice, I want to say to every compromise lily-livered congressman, I want to say to every liberal pulpit in America, you'll stand before almighty God and answer for the deaths of those little babies!"[32] Adrian Rogers, whom fundamentalists elected president of the convention in 1979, regularly used his platform to attack abortion rights and insist that Southern Baptists should oppose legal abortion in nearly every situation. To him, the "slaughter of millions of innocent lives" was "wrong, wrong, wrong!"[33] Given the starkly different views on the politicization of the abortion issue between fundamentalists and moderates, it was probably no surprise that the two groups saw Christian Right leaders like Jerry Falwell differently. By the early 1980s, 89 percent of self-identified fundamentalists agreed with the statement, "It is good that groups like the Moral Majority are taking a stand for Christian principles." Only 15 percent of moderates agreed.[34]

To understand how moderate and fundamentalists Baptists could disagree on abortion when they were nearly unanimous in expressing contempt for the procedure, observers must bear in mind the very different views they held on the issue of church-state separation. After all, the moderates within the Southern Baptist convention took a position on abortion rights that, although troubling to fundamentalists, was still more conservative than the prevailing sentiment in the country at large. In the end, moderates sided with James Wood, who in 1973 had argued that over-regulation of abortion was a violation of church-state separation

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[32]Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 100-101.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid, 105.

"regardless of one's own moral or religious views on abortion."[35] Baylor professor Dan McGee put it this way: "There is the perennial danger of setting the precedent of enforcing our view of God's will through the state and someday being victimized by the state as a moral minority."[36] Mindful of Baptists' historical preference for the separation of church and state, he insisted that they not force their abortion views on others through the law. Cecil Sherman, another moderate Texas Baptist, framed his personal opposition to abortion in the same manner: "I am unwilling to make my abortion position to be the law of the land . . . Just because most of the people in this country are living like pagans does not give us a right to abandon our first premise and force those pagans to be moral. All religion and religious rule ought to be voluntary."[37] In explaining his earlier decision to oppose a constitutional amendment restricting abortion rights, James Wood echoed these sentiments. His opposition, he said, was "out of concern that in our pluralistic society the state should not embody into law one particular religious or moral viewpoint on which differing views are held by substantial sections of the religious and nonreligious communities." He went on to say that most restrictions on abortion "violate the free exercise clause of the First Amendment as we understand it in in the Baptist faith. To be consistent with the freedom of conscience protected by the free exercise clause, public policy decision should neither condone nor espouse abortion and should take no position on the nature of the fetus."[38] These Texas Baptist leaders found it difficult

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[35]"Wood Criticizes Abortion Bill," *Baptist Standard*, July 25, 1973, 4.
[36]Hankins, 173.
[37]Ibid.
[38]Ibid., 174.

to see any social or political issue, even one as controversial as abortion, outside the lens of their strong views on the separation of church and state. Regardless of how much they opposed abortion on a personal or religious level, to impose those beliefs on the public through the passing of laws seemed to them a very un-Baptist thing to do.

To be sure, these opinions were dominant among the leadership of Texas Baptists, with many lay persons opposing abortion in more visceral terms or even expressing shock that the leadership was not more disposed to ban abortions in most circumstances. The letters that readers sent to the *Baptist Standard* are indicative of this point. As the abortion debate heated up in the 1970s, one letter chastised Texas Baptist leadership for supporting the national convention's resolution on abortion. "Our church has been writing to our senators and congressmen to let them know that as Southern Baptists we are against legalized abortion," the letter read. "Now our Southern Baptist leaders come up with compromising even to the point of sin. They said if a woman was emotionally upset it was a reason for abortion."[39] The author followed this statement with a threat to leave the convention if it did not move in a more conservative direction. "I have always been a true Southern Baptist, but as I see it our convention is compromising with sin . . . . We must get right with Jesus as Southern Baptists or I am afraid those of us who really want to serve God will be leaving the convention."[40] Another lashed out at the convention's support for exceptions, insisting, "I would like for someone to give me the book, chapter, and

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[39]Jim Wilkerson, "Letters to the Editor: Abortion Debate Continues," *Baptist Standard*, July 21, 1971, 2.
[40]Ibid.

verse that justifies the destruction of fetal life whether it be by rape, incest or be deformed." The author also insisted that the exception for the emotional, physical, or mental health of the mother "really boils down to abortion-on-demand," leaving "it to the option of the mother and a cooperating abortionist."[41] Following the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, some Texas Baptists worried that the convention's relatively open policy would eventually allow abortions to be performed in Baptist hospitals. One such letter read: "How can we, as a denomination, witness with credibility about the Christ who died that all might live abundantly while life itself is being destroyed in our Baptist hospitals?" The same letter urged the "Southern Baptist and Texas Baptist conventions to speak out publicly against abortion and to take all steps necessary to eliminate abortive procedures in our denominational medical institutions."[42]

The *Standard* also received positive responses to the leadership's moderate position on abortion rights. A typical letter maintained that the policy was an attempt "to deal righteously with this tragic problem" and offered support to the national convention for "its concern and its responsible stand."[43] But it is fair to say that state Baptists were far more divided on the question than the leadership, which was strongly inclined to support the national convention's moderate approach in the early years of the abortion wars. The very fact that Baptists debated this issue so strenuously belies the common narrative that white southern evangelicals moved easily into an alliance with the Christian Right

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[41]Paul Payne, "Letters to the Editor: Abortion Debate Continues," *Baptist Standard*, July 21, 1971. 2.
[42]Robert J. and Vickie Butler, "Letters to the Editor: Plea for Abortion Policy," *Baptist Standard*, June 6, 1973, 2.
[43]J. R. Clemons, "Letters to the Editor: Abortion Debate Continues," *Baptist Standard*, July 21, 1971, 2.

and the pro-life movement. But the moderation of Texas Baptist leaders on the issue is even more surprising, given that many scholars have taken for granted that Southern Baptists were unanimous in opposing abortion rights. To fully understand the tumultuous nature of political change in the South after 1960, historians must be honest about the initial Southern Baptist reaction to *Roe vs. Wade*. Not only did the convention adopt a moderately pro-choice stance, but Baptist leaders openly defended that stance and questioned the wisdom of using the law to implement private religious beliefs about the sinfulness of abortion. In short, the strident anti-abortion rabble rousers often associated with the Christian Right were outsiders in the country's largest evangelical denomination as late as the 1970s. The story of Texas Baptists should give pause to historians and political scientists who have taken for granted the alliance between the Republican Party and southern evangelicals.

Another issue that distinguished Texas Baptists from their Christian Right counterparts was the role of women within evangelical churches. From the early 1970s on, a subtle shift occurred in Southern Baptist life on this issue. Members of the denominational leadership, although usually not adamant about the need for women ministers, generally allowed for leniency as more women voiced their desire to enter the clergy and more churches began ordaining women. The denomination's right wing was furious at the thought of Baptist dollars going to support a cause that they were sure was a violation of scripture. They believed that the Bible's admonition that pastors be "the husband of one wife" eliminated women from the possible pool of pastors. Further, they maintained that "when it

says that women should be silent in church and submissive to their husbands, God's intentions are made all the more clear. No matter how a woman feels, the Bible says she cannot be called by God to become a pastor."[44] This fundamentalist emphasis overlapped with arguments by Christian Right leaders like Jerry Falwell who argued that liberals were fundamentally redefining women's role in the family and the church.[45] But it also set them once again on the opposite side from Baptist moderates, who were mostly content to let women ministers become the norm within the Southern Baptist Convention. As usual, Texas Baptists drew a clear line in the sand in support of the moderate cause.

In 1972 the *Standard* published a letter by Linda Jordan, a recent graduate of Southern Seminary who was actively calling for the ordination of women ministers in the SBC. Her letter was nothing less than a personal, passionate plea for the inclusion of women in the Baptist ministry. "You encouraged me continually in my pilgrimage," she wrote, "always stressing that I open my life to total commitment, wherever that leads. Well, it led me to the seminary and into the field of theology." She continued: "Now I must ask you candidly: Do you really believe the gospel you preached to me?"[46] She insisted upon the ability of women to perform on an equal basis with men and rejected the idea that it was "unnatural" for women to share the pulpit. "If God can use a woman minister to our children and our youth, to educate the family, to minister in music, can God not use a woman to speak His words of proclamation or to

[44]Ammerman, 93.
[45]Fore more on Falwell's views on the family, see Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 166-168. For more on the Christian Right and changing views of the family, see James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 186-196.
[46] Linda Jordan, "'Called' or Confused?: Letter From a Daughter," *Baptist Standard*, November 10, 1972, 13.

administer pastoral care?" she asked. "Are we doubting women, or God?"[47] She noted accurately that women filled many roles within the church without much protest from fundamentalists who were eager to oppose women serving in pastoral roles. "If we're doubting women's abilities, then we should promptly remove them from all forms of functional ministry because they are surely shaping lives," she continued.[48] She criticized fundamentalist leaders for launching "an attack on me as if I were your enemy" and insisted that Baptists should "deal with our prejudices."[49] Her letter was a clarion call to Baptists and an open attack on fundamentalists. But it ran in the *Standard* with editorial approval; a caveat printed above the article noted she had been the subject of "strong reaction" from some Baptists and offered that she was merely interested "in a spirit of seeking God's will within the Christian community."[50] Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, Texas Baptists pursued a moderate course on the ordination of women, much to the chagrin of their fundamentalist opponents.

Even before Linda Jordan took to the pages of the *Standard* to argue for women ministers, the editors of that publication had paved the way by endorsing women deacons, which was another subject of controversy. In Southern Baptist churches, deacons served on a leadership team, guiding the laity, consulting with the pastor, and generally providing direction for the congregation on issues like evangelism, missions, and worship. Historically, Baptists reserved such roles for men who were considered to be especially devout in their faith and worthy of

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[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid.
[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid.

such a high leadership position. By the 1970s, some Baptist churches had begun allowing women to serve in such roles, angering fundamentalists.[51] In 1972 the *Standard* published an article by Professor Glenn Hinson that presented the case for women deacons and rejected the notion that the practice was unbiblical. He insisted, "Of all denominations none perhaps has a stronger practical motivation for proceeding with this (the ordination of women deacons) than Southern Baptists."[52] Contemporary readers might be surprised at the ease with which the article brushed aside the tradition of excluding women, dismissing it as more rooted in culture than in scripture. Male-only deacon policies were "doubtless weighted more heavily on the side of tradition or prejudice than on that of the Bible and theology. Western society has been paternalistic from the beginnings of the Christian era."[53] As for the fundamentalist insistence on taking literally the verses about male deacons, the article warned: "Scripture, taken out of context and applied as hard and fast rules, and history have been used as sticks to prop up typical prejudices in this regard." [54] Hinson went on to describe why Baptists should embrace the spirit of Paul's admonition that "there is neither male nor female in Christ" rather than the letter of particular verses that seem to exclude women from serving in churches. His ultimate conclusion was that "society . . . has moved on ahead of the churches" on women's issues and that churches would suffer if they did not embrace "the principle of equality among all human

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[51]For more on the controversy surrounding Baptist women in ministry, see Libby Bellinger, "More Hidden than Revealed: The History of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry," in Shurden, *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC*, 129-150.
[52] E. Glenn Hinson, "Symbols of Mission Emphasis: Early Christian Practices Give Support to Ordination of Baptist Deaconesses," *Baptist Standard*, March 29, 1972, 8.
[53]Ibid.
[54]Ibid.

beings."[55] His conclusions do not seem particularly radical by today's standards, but they were a direct assault on the values of Baptist fundamentalists who had concluded that moderates were not sufficiently conservative in their interpretations of the Bible. The role of women became a focal point for conflict between the two camps; fundamentalists pointed to new understandings of women's roles as evidence that "moderates did not really believe the Bible." Likewise, "when moderates wanted to contrast their tolerance and open-mindedness with fundamentalist oppressiveness, they pointed to their acceptance of women as proof."[56] A growing number of moderate churches moved to embrace women as deacons, but when they did so they often faced efforts at the national convention to deny their members a role in convention proceedings. And women who accepted these roles routinely faced derisive or dismissive comments from their fellow Baptists (One tasteless joke said that a "balanced" committee would include a "Jew, a woman, and a cripple").[57] By embracing a more active role for women in local churches, Texas Baptists placed themselves on the progressive side of a contentious denominational issue, further alienating them from the burgeoning movement of Christian Right activists and the movement's primary spokesperson, Jerry Falwell.

In 1974 the *Standard* ran another article on the subject, this one concerning the "changes that have occurred among the churches of our

[55]Ibid.
[56]Ammerman, 93.
[57]Ibid, 94.

denomination concerning the place of leadership of women."[58] The author noted with approval that "Women have been ordained to the ministry and women have been ordained as deacons in a number of churches."[59] As with many moderate arguments, the *Standard*'s emphasis was not on dispensing with biblical authority but with slightly altering traditional understandings based on newer readings of the Bible. For example, the author reports that a noted Baptist "outstanding Greek scholar" had recently offered a new interpretation of verses in I Timothy's third chapter that had traditionally been used to argue against women deacons. Based on better understandings of the Greek word for "women" (as opposed to "wives"), he concluded that the verses in question actually offered support for the ordination of women ministers.[60] While more liberal mainline denominations were content to do away with a literal understanding of the Bible, moderate Baptists were careful not to do anything that would undermine their historic belief in the full authority of the Bible over the lives of Baptists. But they were willing to consider new interpretations, which distinguished them from their fundamentalist counterparts. The article offered, "We are driven to the conclusion that the practice of having women deacons developed within the New Testament times and became fairly common in the period just after the close of the New Testament era . . . The New Testament seems clearly to allow such a practice."[61]

In 1974 the SBC's Christian Life Commission (CLC) took a bold stance on women's issues when it recommended a bylaw change that would require one-

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[58]Robert L. Cate, "Issue for Some Churches: 'Shall We Have Women Deacons?'" *Baptist Standard*, April 17, 1974, 4.
[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid.

fifth of all convention boards and committees to be filled by women. Foy Valentine was director of the CLC at the time, and his leadership on the issue was another sign that Texas Baptists were out of step with the convention's gradual move towards a fundamentalist position on women's issues. The *Standard* published the full text of the proposed changes, along with an article from the CLC (presumably written by Valentine himself) that explained the reasoning behind them. The article noted that "The Bible champions human liberation" and insisted that "Both men and women share the freedom which Christ gives."[62] It went on to delineate ways that society at-large discriminates against women, pointing out that "Injustice towards women persists to some degree in every institution in society: government, business, education, and the church. So imbedded is discrimination against women that it affects not only the hearts and minds of people in society, but also the institutions and structures of society itself."[63] The author noted that Baptist churches had often mimicked such discrimination by refusing to allow women leadership roles, either through official policies or social custom. It is important to understand that even while the CLC implored Baptists to embrace "the great concept of the human liberation of women in Jesus Christ," its leaders cautioned that they were not endorsing "the ideas or actions of every person who unfurls the women's liberation banner. Irresponsibility is no respecter of the sexes."[64] As was often the case for moderate Baptists, the threat of being identified with liberals or feminists was so

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[62]"Freedom for Women! Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission Recommends Bylaw Changes," *Baptist Standard*, May 29, 1974, 8.
[63]Ibid.
[64]Ibid.

great that CLC leaders expressly separated themselves from the broader movement for women's liberation.

Although Valentine shied away from identification with feminists, he did offer a plan that was a substantive and quite progressive attempt to change how Southern Baptists dealt with women. First, he called for an affirmation of "the Bible's teaching that every individual has infinite worth and that in Christ there is neither male nor female."[65] He also proposed working "to develop greater sensitivity to both overt and covert discrimination against women" and urged that Baptists "endeavor through religious, political, social, business and educational structures to eliminate such discrimination."[66] Additionally, he argued that Baptists should reject "discrimination against women in job placement by providing equal pay for equal work and by electing women to positions of leadership for which God's gifts and the Holy Spirit's calling equips them."[67] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he recommended that the SBC change its bylaws to allow for and promote greater gender diversity. His proposal was simple; he wanted to add only one sentence to the section titled "How Board Members, Trustees, Commissioners or Members of Standing Committees Are Elected." That sentence would read: "At least one-fifth of the total members shall be women."[68]

Valentine faced fierce resistance to his calls for change on the issue of women in leadership and grew frustrated that, as he put it, "Southern Baptists are

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[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.
[67]Ibid.
[68]Ibid.

behind most other church groups in the nation."[69] His explanation for that backwardness, interestingly, was geographical: "There's no place in America as committed to male chauvinism as the South, and we are Southern Baptists. And I think that's a reflection of the culture. You find the cries against women in leadership reminiscent of the Old South and 'Protect our women upon our plantations.'"[70] He was unequivocal in his view that fundamentalists were not endorsing a particular view of the Bible so much as they were defending outdated ideas about the role of women in society. He described the fundamentalist strategy to block his proposals as "just an unregenerate approach to the issue and a kind of continued defense of male chauvinism and male sexism, which goes back thousands of years."[71] He continued: "It is a conservative attitude" that led "the fundamentalist members" to "carry the torch for that ultra conservatism. It is authentic extremism."[72]

Following the CLC's proposals, the annual meeting of the SBC in June 1974 was dominated by controversies about the proper role of women in the church. Messengers to the convention took up the CLC's resolution, but split it into two separate items. The first resolution offered a general statement affirming "the Bible teaching that every individual is of infinite worth" and "that, in Christ, there is neither male nor female."[73] It also pledged the convention to work to eliminate discrimination against women. Since changes to the Southern Baptist bylaws required a two-thirds majority, supporters of women's rights believed this

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[69]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton (Texas Baptist Project, 10 August 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 110.
[70]Ibid.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Ibid.
[73]"Convention: Women's Ordination Issue Referred," *Baptist Standard*, June 19, 1974, 4.

resolution would be less controversial and might get passed; they were wrong. Some messengers interpreted it as a "tacit endorsement" of ordaining women in Southern Baptist churches and spoke against it. Others agreed with a Houston delegate that "the external ordination of women" could "revolutionize our denomination" and that any debates touching on the subject should be made at the local level.[74] Ultimately, messengers tabled discussion of the measure, opting to leave the decision in the hands of local churches. The other CLC resolution concerned the more controversial measure to require that one-fifth of all committees, commissions and boards consist of women. Much of the debate surrounding the amendment involved fears of a "quota system" and feminism generally. The resolution failed by a large margin. A *Baptist Standard* reporter wryly noted that "The debate ranged across a quota system and messengers appeared to be more concerned about that than about the matter of women and boards."[75]

Valentine led the national efforts of the CLC, and James Dunn led the local efforts of the Texas Christian Life Commission. For his part, Dunn agreed with Valentine and lamented the convention's refusal to embrace women ministers. Speaking the day after the convention, he insisted, "That whole move yesterday and the mood of the convention is so antifeminist, anti-woman."[76] Dunn worried about how the failed resolution might impact women who were pursuing the ministry as a career. "I just don't think we can estimate the damage that was

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[74]Ibid.
[75]Ibid.
[76]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by H. Wayne Pipkin and Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 28.

done" to those women by the antifeminist tone of the convention. "They already have problems with that, and then they see this slap in the face from the convention," Dunn said. "I don't think we can appreciate how many sensitive, intelligent, committed, dedicated young women (and men, too, for that matter, who are sensitive to the rights and dignity of women) have been hurt; and whom we will ultimately, if not immediately, lose from the denomination."[77] While that prospect may not have been troubling to the fundamentalists who were gaining power in the convention, it bothered Dunn a great deal. To him, such women and their supporters were "the very kind of people we desperately need to keep. And . . . the very fact that we'd be debating whether or not to recognize the call of God if it were felt by a woman, that that would be a matter of convention debate, is very negative."[78] Although moderates like Valentine and Dunn had held sway with the national convention in the past, their support for women's rights was gradually replaced by the more strident, antifeminist approach of the fundamentalists.

In short, Texas Baptists were on the losing side of a denominational battle over the role of women in the church and in society. Although they lost that battle, the commitment of the state Baptist leadership to women's reproductive freedom and to ending discrimination against women is striking. Given the role of contemporary Southern Baptists in opposing abortion rights and in defending traditional roles for women, observers might be surprised to find Texas Baptists arguing for progressive change in the 1970s and 1980s. But the concern for

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[77]Ibid, 29.
[78]Ibid.

women's rights was perfectly in keeping with their moderate Baptist tradition, which embraced incremental change on social issues without abandoning the historic Baptist belief in the supremacy of the Bible. It also distinguished them from fundamentalists and conservatives within the Southern Baptist Convention, who formed the backbone of the Christian Right in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The moderate approach of Texas Baptists to women's issues is a reminder that the alliance of white evangelicals with the Religious Right and the Republican Party was not the inevitable result of Baptist theology. Large numbers of Baptists, particularly in Texas, rejected the fundamentalists' posturing on issues of gender and preferred a more measured response to changing social attitudes about the role of women. This knowledge should complicate our understanding of southern evangelicals, deepen our appreciation for the complexity of southern religious thought, and give pause to historians who have assumed that Southern Baptists moved easily into the New Right and the Republican Party.

Chapter 5

"God's Economic Justice": Texas Baptists and Poverty Activism, 1960-1985

In the summer of 1971 W. R. White, former president of Baylor University and a prominent Texas Baptist, penned an editorial in the *Baptist Standard* titled "God's Economic Justice." In it, he expressed a viewpoint on the Christian response to poverty that was characteristic of many Texas Baptists in the 1960s and 1970s. Quoting passages from the Old Testament, he concluded, "It is very evident that, in addition to His great redemptive passion, the Lord is described as very interested in the poor, oppressed, and strangers. In fact, God is presented as a champion of the cause of the poor."[1] Like many evangelicals, White held to the biblical teaching that "if we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord."[2] But unlike leaders of the Christian Right, who came to view poverty as an issue better handled by private charity than public action, he believed society had a collective responsibility to alleviate the suffering of the poor. "Our society should protect the rights of all citizens and see that the door of opportunity is kept open for all without artificial hindrances."[3] To justify his position, he cited a passage from the book of Micah in which God punished leaders who ignored the needs of the poor or sought to do them harm. "They became obsessed with the idea of devouring the poor and defenseless," he wrote, "stripping them of every vestige of comfort and well-being, even the very necessities of life. Their selfish covetousness

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[1]W. R. White, "God's Economic Justice," *Baptist Standard*, June 16, 1971, 23.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid.

seemed to have had no limits." To White, this story was still relevant: "Top leaders in the land are reminded that they should know and champion justice," eschewing "hate and prejudice."[4]

White's statements, featured in the pages of Texas' leading Baptist magazine, demonstrate an important distinction between moderate Texas Baptists and their Christian Right counterparts: their responses to poverty. In the 1970s and 1980s, Christian conservatives pushed for a government that was active in its promotion of traditional family values but limited in its response to economic and social matters like poverty, health care, illiteracy, and hunger. Their attitude was reflected in statements such as those of Christian Right activist Connie Mashner, who recoiled at the idea of "a welfare state" in which "the government feeds the poor." To her and other organizers within the Christian Right, "When Jesus Christ says 'Feed the hungry' . . . he means, "Go in your kitchen and cook a meal and take it down the street to the homeless shelter, not 'Pay some taxes' . . . . "[5] This type of sentiment did not reflect the mainstream of thought among Texas Baptists, and it is yet another reason that Texas Baptists parted company with the emerging movement of religious conservatives. While Texas Baptists never sought to replace evangelism or spiritual concerns with economic activism, they did embrace a much broader response to the issue of poverty than leaders of the Christian Right. Their anti-poverty work in the 1960s and 1970s included an embrace of governmental action, which distinguished them from a Christian Right movement that rejected such governmental activism

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[4]Ibid.
[5]William Martin, *With God on Our Side*: *The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 187.

and ultimately supported a slashing of the welfare state in the 1980s.[6]

To understand how Texas Baptists handled poverty issues in the 1960s and 1970s, historians must recognize that they filled a political and social space somewhere to the right of "social gospel" proponents and to the left of the Christian Right. Since the late nineteenth century, advocates of a social gospel had argued that Christian ethics should be extended to a range of social problems like poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and the unequal treatment of women and African Americans. While this type of thinking became influential in northern churches, southerners mostly rejected the Social Gospel, holding to a more fundamentalist interpretation of God's justice. Religious historian George Marsden has argued that theological conservatives rejected the Social Gospel because its "implication was that theological doctrine and affirmation of faith in Christ and his deeds were irrelevant, except as an inspiration to moral action, more specifically social action."[7] Fundamentalists saw the Social Gospel as a threat because it "was presented, or was thought to be presented, as equivalent to the Gospel itself."[8] To put it another way, religious groups like Southern Baptists found it difficult to take action on social issues without seeming to embrace the Social Gospel's abandonment of individual salvation as the cornerstone of Christian faith. But Texas Baptists actually found a way to balance conservative theological understandings with a call to social action. By the

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[6]For a detailed synthesis of the Christian Right's involvement with economic conservatism, see Martin's *With God on Our Side*; Matthew C. Moen, *The Transformation of the Christian Right* (Tuscaloosa, AL and London: University of Alabama Press, 1992); and Ruth Murray Brown, *"For a Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002).
[7]George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 92.
[8]Ibid.

1960s, they were merging those two impulses in powerful ways, resulting in a brand of Christianity that rejected northern liberalism but also could not be reconciled with the economic concerns of the Christian Right. The story of Texas Baptists in the 1960s and 1970s is one that does not fit easily into the common theological tropes of northern liberalism and southern fundamentalism. For that reason, they found themselves increasingly isolated, unable to accept the Christian Right's disregard for pressing social problems but unwilling to abandon the conservative theology that had guided Baptists for many years.

To understand how Texas Baptists viewed these issues, historians must assess the work of the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC), the social advocacy arm of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. From the start, the agency was devoted to alleviating major societal ills in a Christian context. Founded in 1950, the TCLC was the primary vehicle through which Texas Baptist leaders aimed to increase the social consciousness of Baptists. In doing so, these leaders often promoted concern for issues that many Baptists deemed outside the realm of Christian life. From the moment of its inception, the TCLC faced attacks from many national Southern Baptists (and some within Texas) for a number of its emphases, from racial equality to support for government welfare to its insistence that churches stay active on economic issues. Critics insisted that it was replacing evangelism and personal salvation with social activism and concern for the poor. In general, Texas Baptists resisted these attacks and defended the agency's work, insisting that a reasonable application of social Christianity should be part of Baptist life. They were mostly inclined to agree with

Foy Valentine, who led the TCLC in the 1960s and 1970s and refuted fundamentalist claims "that we were an offense to (their) great work of saving the world, and we were scandalizing (their) efforts to save the human race, and therefore should be abolished."[9]

When Valentine took over the TCLC in 1953, he found a thriving agency but also strong resistance to its goals from some elements of the state Baptist convention. At that time, years before fundamentalists formally organized an effort to take control of the Southern Baptist Convention, Valentine realized that Texas Baptists would need to be vigilant in protecting the social dimension of their work. "There were a lot of folks that thought they could get us abolished," he remembers, "but there was too much acceptance on the part of too many leaders and too much grassroots acceptance of the basic things we were trying to do . . . for us to be in jeopardy as an agency."[10] Before the fundamentalists gained control of the national convention (and before the Christian Right was a prominent political movement), Texas Baptists mostly believed the TCLC was "too important a part of our overall Christian witness for the convention to back itself away from. When the votes were taken from time to time on whether to cut our budget completely . . . we really were not much threatened."[11] Throughout his tenure, Valentine led the TCLC to support liberal economic measures that embraced government aid to the poor, championed public welfare, and challenged the assumption that poverty was inevitable in a thriving capitalist

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[9]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton and David Stricklin. (Texas Baptist Project, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 63.
[10]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Project, 1989), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 6.
[11]Ibid.

economy. The interesting part of this story is not that one Texas Baptist pushed a liberal economic agenda, but that he did so with the support of the state convention, the well wishes of most Texas Baptists, and routine editorial support from the official publication of the state convention. His efforts laid the groundwork for the social activism that was a central part of the Texas Baptist experience in the 1960s and 1970s. That activist work provides a clue as to why Texas Baptists rejected an alliance with the Christian Right and national conservatives in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Valentine gave particular emphasis to his goal of engaging Baptist pastors in Texas to spur Christian activism on issues like poverty and Baptist efforts to improve race relations (the subject of Chapter 6). In 1957 he started a TCLC tradition: an annual conference at Southwestern Seminary at which pastors could receive training in the social aspects of Baptist faith. These conferences dealt with a myriad of issues; for example, the 1958 conference touched on politics, race relations, and the need to defend the separation of church and state.[12] To Valentine, the purpose of these meetings was "to bring together a cross section of Baptist leadership, particularly pastors, to discuss the application of the gospel to a particular area of life."[13] In 1960 Valentine left the TCLC to become executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the national version of the agency he headed in Texas.[14] He left the TCLC in great shape. By the time of his departure, it benefited from generous funding, institutional support, and a

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[12]The March 1, 1958, issue of the *Baptist Standard* provides information about the various topics of the 1957 conference.
[13]John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1950-1980* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 1986), 155.
[14]Ibid.

general feeling among Texas Baptists that social activism was an important part of their Christian duty.

If Valentine's stint at the TCLC laid the groundwork, it was Jimmy Allen's term as president that cemented the organization's reputation for social activism and solidified Texas Baptists' commitment to economic issues. He replaced Foy Valentine in 1960 and continued the push to keep Texas Baptists socially relevant and engaged on issues like poverty, race relations, the separation of church and state, and education. Raised in Hope, Arkansas, Allen had attended Howard Payne University, a Baptist school in west Texas, and graduated from Southwestern Seminary, the largest Baptist seminary located in Texas.[15] Allen was relatively open about the fact that before his tenure at Southwestern, he viewed Christian faith almost exclusively in terms of personal salvation, evangelism, and missions. The idea that Christianity should also play a role in major social or economic issues was foreign to him. It was his exposure to Dr. T. B. Maston, a Christian ethics professor at Southwestern, that fundamentally transformed his view of Baptist life. Maston was a "demanding scholar" and a "very excited kind of teacher" who developed Allen's graduate curriculum and guided him through his studies. Maston helped transform Allen's experience at Southwestern into one of "intellectual excitement and growth." Most importantly to Allen, Southwestern introduced him to "social ethics and political action," prompting him to question why Baptists were not more involved in dealing with

[15]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 39, 59.

social concerns.[16] By the time he arrived at the TCLC, Allen was deeply committed to the project of increasing social activism among Southern Baptists, in general, and Texas Baptists in particular.

When Allen took over the TCLC in 1960, it was divided into four broad subcommittees: State Missions, Christian Education, Human Welfare, and Christian Life. Significantly for Allen, Bill Pinson, who had worked under Foy Valentine, agreed to stay on and help Allen push Texas Baptists to be more active on social issues. Pinson ended up becoming a leader and full-time staffer in the organization who was particularly helpful in Allen's campaigns to expand public welfare funding in Texas in the 1960s and 1970s. Allen would later describe him as a "demonstration model A of what was really happening . . . to create the whole change" of increased social awareness among Texas Baptists.[17] Although he inherited a reasonably strong agency and an important partner in Pinson, Allen also found an agency that was unaccustomed to strong political action and faced frequent questions from state Baptists about the necessity of its existence. Occasionally, these questions became hostile and turned into attacks on the TCLC and its work. Allen came to the TCLC with a strong belief that to achieve social justice for all citizens, Texas Baptists would have to become more direct in engaging the political process. He had a deep "concern for political things, when it came down to actually walking the halls of the legislature and

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[16]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 89-90.
[17]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 107-108.

dealing with" pressing issues.[18] But before Allen could transform the organization into a vehicle for political action, he first had to defend it against attacks from some Texas Baptists who worried that it was becoming too liberal and could draw the focus of state Baptists away from evangelism.

Almost immediately upon taking office, Allen realized that his first responsibility would be "the task of just survival of the commission, which dealt with the inner ecclesiastical politics of trying to keep the commission alive and structured so that it could be free and viable to do its task."[19] The immediate threat came from Dr. Woodrow Fuller, who served as secretary of the State Missions Commission (SMC). Over time, the SMC had become one of the most powerful entities within the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and Dr. Fuller was in the process of pulling as many different commissions as possible under the larger umbrella of the SMC. When he set his sights on the TCLC, Allen viewed it as "a death knell to our commission," largely because of the structure of the SMC, which emphasized a top-down approach. From Allen's vantage point, the TCLC could push more easily for an emphasis on social activism if it did not receive constant instruction and oversight from the SMC, which was generally a much more conservative organization.[20]

To avoid this change, Allen had to convince the new executive secretary of Texas Baptists, T. A. Patterson, who had been elected to the position just months after Allen took over the TCLC. Patterson was not a natural ally for Allen

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[18]Ibid, 109.
[19]Ibid, 110.
[20]For more information on Dr. Woodrow Fuller's work with the SMC, see Storey's *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980*, 165-166.

and Texas Baptists who wanted to emphasize the social aspects of Baptist faith. Following his election, Patterson had gone on record in the *Baptist Standard* as stating that "evangelism should pervade everything we do because the main business of the church is winning souls to Christ."[21] Patterson had already developed a reputation as a strong proponent of evangelism and a skeptic of social activism through his regular articles in the *Baptist Standard*. But Patterson surprised Allen by inviting him to executive meetings, at which major decisions about Baptist agencies were usually made. Although he shared more ideologically with Fuller, Patterson also seemed to realize that Fuller's extensive power made him the de facto leader of Texas Baptists. Patterson was not interested in helping Fuller further expand his influence. The "power struggle," as Allen described it, worked to the benefit of the TCLC and helped Allen gain more influence in state Baptist politics than previous leaders of the organization.[22] With his newfound influence, Allen proceeded to establish the TCLC as an independent commission, cooperating with other agencies on certain issues but not answerable to them about the inner workings of the TCLC. According to Allen, the TCLC "had enough enemies who wanted to do us in" that "politicking for the preservation of the Christian Life Commission" was the most essential task in the early days of his leadership.[23] The robust political actions of the TCLC in the 1960s and 1970s would probably not have been possible without Allen's early work in guaranteeing the independence of the organization and making it

[21]T. A. Patterson, "Evangelism First," *Baptist Standard*, September 21, 1960, 7.
[22]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 110-111. For more information on the struggle between Patterson and Fuller, see Storey, 163-169.
[23]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 110.

central to Texas Baptist life. He later credited "good friends in key pastorates and a whole lot of sitting through meetings that I didn't enjoy" with his successes.[24] Whatever the reason, his organization grew in influence in the 1960s and 1970s, creating and strengthening a Texas Baptist tradition of supporting the needy, agitating for liberal economic policies, and pushing conservative Baptists to consider non-evangelistic elements of their Christian faith.

Upon establishing the TCLC as a vital part of Baptist life, Allen set to work convincing his fellow Texas Baptists that "Christian social concern" should be an important part of their faith. But he aimed for more than simply raising awareness about issues like poverty, education, immigration, and others; he also believed that Baptists should be politically engaged on those issues.[25] The impulses of the 1960s and the activism they generated certainly helped his cause. "This was a time, during the Sixties, when the whole culture was becoming more and more politically oriented, more and more politically aware," he remembers. "We became greatly enthusiastic as Americans about the possibilities of social change through the political process that reflected a great deal in our own philosophy and in what we were able to do at that time."[26] Building on that desire for a more socially-conscious type of Baptist faith, Allen focused on "making contacts in Austin," gaining "a better understanding of the workings of state government," and "build(ing) the citizenship IQ of our Texas Baptist constituencies so that they could respond more effectively to other issues."[27]

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[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid, 129.
[26]Ibid, 130.
[27]Ibid, 142.

Even as Allen pushed to educate Texas Baptists about political issues and social activism, he never abandoned his belief in the separation of church and state. In fact, many of his political activities involved defending the separation of church and state (some of these are documented in chapters 1 and 2). To Allen, his reputation for defending church/state separation actually helped in his advocacy for the poor when it came to convincing legislators to grant more funding. "They knew we weren't asking for anything for Baptists, which is the first separation of church and state," he remembered. "We're not here trying to get you to put money into our institutions . . . We're here trying to ask for something for other people, and we've got good reasons for it."[28]

Over time, Allen and the TCLC gave Texas Baptists a reputation for social concern (critics sometimes called it liberalism) and political activism. But this activism in the 1960s and 1970s was a far cry from the activities that would characterize the Christian Right in the 1970s and beyond. Allen supported increased welfare spending, championed the cause of bilingual education, openly supported Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty programs, and pushed Texas Baptists to reach out to "the least of these." His brand of Baptist politics might be surprising in a contemporary context, but he saw it as just another extension of his Christian beliefs. His work and the precedent it set helps us understand why so many Texas Baptists rejected an alliance with the Christian Right and provides a more complicated picture of white southern evangelicals than historians have previously considered.

One example of Allen's social Christianity was his ardent support for

[28]Ibid, 148.

allowing teachers in Texas public schools to conduct lessons in Spanish. As Texas experienced a surge in its Latino population in the 1950s and 1960s, the question of bilingual education became a controversial one in the state. Advocates noted the impracticality of insisting on English-only instruction in areas of south Texas where a majority of students in many school districts were only fluent in Spanish. Conservatives worried that allowing bilingual education would hamper efforts at assimilation and position Spanish as an alternative language for common use in Texas. To say that many of these critics shrouded their concerns in veiled racism would probably be an understatement.[29] Historian Carlos Blanton has identified the years of 1965-1968 as the time period when advocates of bilingual education truly gained political prominence and began to push their agenda through advocacy, activism, and organized politics.[30]

Those years coincided with the height of Allen's power at the TCLC, and he used that power to support Spanish-language instruction in Texas classrooms. The TCLC went on record in support of bilingual education, splitting with many conservative evangelicals in the state. "We worked for years to try to get the Spanish language taught in the public schools so that we could have bilingual education," he remembers. "It was a hot issue that we took some heat for but we believed it was best for some of the most vulnerable citizens in Texas, in helping them have a chance at an education."[31] James Dunn, who worked at the TCLC at the time and eventually succeeded Allen, helped Allen craft the

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[29]For a more detailed examination of the controversy surrounding bilingual education in Texas, see Carlos Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836-1981* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2004), 124-140.
[30]Ibid, 126.
[31]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 153.

message and push for bilingual education. Allen and Dunn only advocated for funding to help Spanish-speaking children receive instruction in both languages, with the ultimate goal being for students to become fluent in English. The main idea was that Spanish-speaking students would learn English quickly but would not fall behind academically while learning the language. "We were trying to get folks to understand that you can't Americanize them (Spanish-speaking students) or teach them English unless you start very early on and you have someone who can move them from the language they speak into English," Dunn explained. "So it was just transitional bilingual education, required in the early grades only."[32]

In staking out a position in favor of bilingual education, Dunn and Allen drew a series of attacks from conservatives whom Dunn believed "misunderstood what we were discussing when you said the phrase, bilingual education."[33] These critics "thought that we were talking about bilingual education for both Anglo and Spanish-speaking children, that we were going to . . . require in the public school systems that all Anglo children speak Spanish."[34] Dunn personally felt that doing so "was not a bad idea, but it was not what we were working on."[35] The other significant charge that critics leveled at the TCLC was that the real goal was to run a dual program in which Spanish-speaking students went all the way through high school speaking two languages without ever moving fully to English. While Dunn clearly believed that all students would be better off speaking two languages, he described these fears as "foreign, completely foreign, to what we

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[32]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1980), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 91.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.

were talking about."[36] Despite these criticisms, the TCLC was successful in getting the bill passed, and it did include funding from the state for the type of early-grade bilingual education that Dunn and Allen advocated.[37] Although it took until the early 1970s before the bill was finally passed, Allen was gratified that "the Christian Life Commission played a very significant role in getting that done."[38]

One interesting aspect of the TCLC's fight for bilingual education is the role of Billy Graham, who proved infuriating to Texas Baptist leadership on social issues, particularly with his embrace of then-Governor John Connally. Connally had been an erstwhile opponent of the TCLC on many issues, ranging from his support for gambling to his response to poverty. James Dunn described the Texas Baptist feelings about Connally: "He . . . shafted a living wage for the school teachers, insulted the blacks, and refused to even listen to the Mexican-American migrant workers."[39] Additionally, he failed "to fund bilingual education once it had been passed" and "in general, had demonstrated that he didn't have a great deal of concern for the little man or for social issues."[40] It was in that context that Billy Graham frustrated many Texas Baptists in 1969 during one of his crusades in San Antonio. Not only did he invite Governor Connally to share the stage with him (that was probably to be expected), but he went out of his way to call Connally forward and to extol his virtues as a Christian man and an

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[36]Ibid.
[37]"State Approves Some Funding for Bilingual Education," *Dallas Morning News*, April 2, 1971, 3.
[38]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 153.
[39]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 79.
[40]Ibid.

excellent governor. Dunn remembers it this way: "Here we were fighting him (Connally) for all we were worth, with a lot of other denominational leaders across the denominational spectrum who felt our concern about the direction the governor was leading the state."[41] In the middle of that struggle, "Billy Graham comes in, apparently not even knowing what was going on in the state, and casually puts his blessing on the man."[42] When asked why Bill Graham would undermine the TCLC's efforts so publicly, Allen attributed it to ignorance.[43] But Graham's comments were another demonstration of the ambivalence Texas Baptists faced from the larger evangelical world about their efforts to raise social awareness and fight for economic justice.

Allen also pushed Texas Baptists to reshape some of their evangelistic enterprises in light of social concerns and to make them more responsive to the concerns of the poor. This emphasis became especially important in the development of a new "river ministry" that Texas Baptists crafted in the 1960s to bring Baptist churches to the Rio Grande Valley along the Texas/Mexico border. Allen had no objection to the goal of evangelism, calling it "legitimate activity" for Baptists. But he was frustrated with the original plan, which "was going to consist of simply putting up tents and having Bible schools."[44] Allen and other TCLC leaders felt that the project would be a failure without some measure of cultural understanding and a greater emphasis on the physical needs of people in the region. To that end, the TCLC proposed that Texas Baptists coordinate their

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[41]Ibid.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid, 157.

efforts with workers from the Community Action Program (CAP), who were already working on poverty issues in the Rio Grande Valley.[45]

First proposed by President Lyndon Johnson as part of his famous "War on Poverty," CAP programs took root all across the country with the primary goal of equipping the poor to deal with persistent problems like poverty, malnutrition, and unsafe drinking water. Johnson envisioned the program in part as a way to funnel federal dollars to Democratic constituencies, but many of its proponents saw it as a way to organize the poor politically, which they did in many cases.[46] Allen viewed CAP organizers in the Rio Grande Valley as both cultural assets who could help Baptists understand their role as allies in the struggle to meet the material needs of the impoverished region. "We are not going to be able to do this job unless we hear from these people who are dealing with the poor up and down the river," he insisted. "We need to go out and hear them and to find out what they're doing and find out what they've learned so we don't duplicate their efforts."[47] Texas Baptists leaders agreed, and the TCLC's insistence on coordinating with CAP workers fundamentally transformed the "river valley" project.[48]

Far from simply putting on Bible schools or holding church services, Texas Baptists worked with CAP to provide clean drinking water for communities by digging new wells, setting up clinics to stop the spread of malaria, and organizing

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[45]Ibid.
[46]For a more detailed reading of the Community Action Program, see Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 121-128.
[47]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 158.
[48]Ibid.

the poor to funnel federal dollars to the most vital projects in their communities. To be sure, Texas Baptists' never abandoned their original goal of evangelism; but thanks to the TCLC, the program came to place at least as much emphasis on the social and physical needs of the region. To Allen, CAP workers were crucial to Baptist work in the region: "We listened to them and their input fashioned our understanding of the needs of the people in ways that nothing else could have done."[49] Allen and the TCLC did all of this with the full support and cooperation of state Baptists and without much controversy. It is telling that the same government programs that stirred opposition from the Christian Right in the 1980s were crucial to the outreach efforts of Texas Baptists in the 1960s. Texas Baptists' embrace of Johnson's CAP was another indication that they did not share the emphases of the growing conservative movement, whose leaders saw the worst of America in such programs. Texas Baptists were not liberals, and they never claimed to be. But they did have a social conscience, they were particularly interested in helping the poor, and they were not naturally inclined to embrace a political movement that was contemptuous of efforts to alleviate poverty.

In 1968 Jimmy Allen made the decision to retire from the TCLC and take a pastorate in San Antonio. By the end of the his tenure, the Commission "was finally recognized across the state as being a legitimate commission of Texas Baptist life" and "considered a major commission by everybody."[50] Hoping that his successor could build on that work, Allen recommended James L. Dunn as his

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[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid, 111.

replacement, and Dunn became executive director of the TCLC.[51] Previously, Dunn had served as associate director of the TCLC, but he did not initially plan to accept the post. "I didn't see myself in the public spokesman role that Allen had done so well," he explained, but he eventually agreed because "Jimmy (Allen) agreed to be a great deal of help to me."[52]

Despite his initial reluctance, Dunn would end up serving on the TCLC through 1980. His tenure pushed Texas Baptists even further down the path of social activism and away from the emphases of the Christian Right, a movement that would be fully organized by the end of Dunn's tenure. During his time as director, Dunn emphasized a range of social issues, but he gave particular focus to the issue of poverty, working in tandem with liberal leaders in the state to ensure greater public assistance to the poor. He did so with the full support of the state Baptist convention. As the Christian Right organized in the l970s, it embraced the conservative economics of the New Right and became a central part of the Republican coalition. But Texas Baptists, who were equally conservative on theological issues, did not fit easily into this coalition when it came to economic or social justice issues. The comparative liberalism of Texas Baptists on these issues is a central reason why the country's largest group of Baptists rejected an alliance with the Christian Right and the GOP. Dunn's time with the TCLC solidified the Texas Baptist commitment to social justice, thereby cementing the divide between themselves and the emerging movement of

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[51]Storey, 167. Also, see Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine. Interview by H. Wayne Pipkin and Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 20.

[52]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by H. Wayne Pipkin and Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 21.

Christian conservatives.

Dunn's tenure pushed Texas Baptists in a liberal direction on a number of issues, but the most obvious example was their activism on the issue of welfare. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, organized conservatives throughout the South had already begun campaigns to reduce welfare benefits or, in some cases, to do away with them entirely.[53] In 1969, early in Dunn's tenure, the issue became a hot-button one in Texas because of Proposition 5, which proposed to raise the welfare "ceiling," the maximum number of dollars the state could spend on welfare payments. The ceiling had been written into the state's constitution in 1871 and remained there until the 1969 campaign to change it. The ceiling did not account for population growth or inflation, which meant, in practical terms, that the payments poor families received in the state was very low.[54] Jimmy Allen had put the TCLC on record in favor of raising the welfare ceiling, working with leaders like Houston Congresswoman Barbara Jordan to get Proposition 5 on the ballot. When Dunn took over, he continued that push, leading the 1969 campaign to raise the ceiling from $60 million to $80 million. That effort had a great deal of bipartisan support, as even many conservatives understood that the state constitution was outdated and needed amending. Even so, Dunn had to fight conservative ideas about welfare, some of them based mostly on misinformation. "We fought all the welfare myths," he remembered. "The person on welfare is a woman who just keeps having children in order to get the welfare payments and

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[53]For a full history of the New Right's activism on welfare and other economic issues, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[54]"Texas Debates Welfare Ceiling," *New York Times*, May 1, 1969, 17.

all that sort of thing."[55] Dunn insisted that "the vast majority of people on welfare were too old, too disabled, or too young to hold a job if they wanted to. Most of them were older people . . . ."[56] Proposition 5 passed rather easily in 1969, a victory for the TCLC and state liberals.[57] But the battle over welfare in Texas was really just beginning.

Although Proposition 5 had raised the welfare ceiling, it did so only slightly. Within two years, Texas had already experienced enough population growth and inflation that liberals wanted to raise the ceiling again. As Dunn put it, "We were back down to literally starving people again."[58] But in 1971 liberals realized that the only way to deal with the long-term issue of welfare payments was to amend the state constitution, undoing the arbitrary cap and placing power in the hands of state legislators. Since the bill would leave such decisions in the hands of state legislators, the TCLC leadership saw it as a responsible measure and endorsed it. In May 1971 Phil Strickland, who had worked at the TCLC under Allen and continued on under Dunn, set the tone for the Baptist response with an article in the *Baptist Standard*. Before even a word about politics, he quoted a simple scripture: "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (I John 3:17)."[59] His choice of Bible verse was indicative of his liberal leanings on the issue, and he went on to plead with Texas Baptists to vote in favor of

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[55]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1980), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 123.
[56]Ibid.
[57]"Texas Raises Ceiling on Welfare Payments," *New York Times*, May 22, 1969, 3.
[58]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1980), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 123.
[59]Phil Strickland, "CLC Legislative Report: Welfare Proposition on Ballot," *Baptist Standard*, May 5, 1971, 7.

Proposition 3, which he said would "authorize the spending of additional money for the aged, the blind, the handicapped and the poverty children of Texas."[60] He could not have been more passionate in his support for the measure. "There is a larger percentage of people living in poverty in Texas than in any other state in the nation," he insisted. "Many old people scraping out a meager existence on welfare checks will anxiously wait to discover if that assistance will be even more meager."[61] If the measure failed, "The blind will be hurt . . . The disabled will be hurt. Hungry children will be hungrier. It is important!"[62] To support his case, Strickland carefully explained why he believed the dollar ceiling on welfare payments was irresponsible. "As population increases and more people become eligible for assistance, the dollar amount does not rise."[63] He also pointed out that, due to inflation, the "dollar ceiling" that was originally set in the 1800s had very little relevance to the budgetary constraints of Texas in the 1970s.[64]

Strickland also attacked what he saw as myths about the state welfare program. To refute the notion that welfare mostly ended up in the hands of women with many children, he simply listed the percentages of what type of families ended up with Texas aid: 62.5 percent went to elderly families, who received on average $62.58 per month, hardly a lavish amount; 28.8 percent went to families with dependent children; the permanently disabled got 6.9; and 1.8 percent went to the blind. "Aren't there a lot of people getting welfare who

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[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Ibid.
[63]Ibid.
[64]Ibid.

could be working?" he asked. "Not state welfare."[65] He noted the findings of a recent study of the Texas welfare system: "No one is on welfare in Texas by his own choice. He is on because he has desperate financial and medical needs beyond his capacity to provide."[66] He urged voters to move past their preconceptions about welfare generally and to vote to "move Texas out from under the present ceiling" and to "allow the expenditures in these programs to be set by the elected representatives of the people."[67] He was certainly right about the meager level of assistance Texas provided to dependent families: The *New York Times* noted that the average Texas family on welfare received only $80 per month from the state.[68]

Dunn, Strickland, and the TCLC were not fighting an isolated Baptist battle. The editors of the *Baptist Standard* also staked out a position in favor of repealing the welfare ceiling and giving state legislators the power to set welfare payments. In a state Baptist convention that was decentralized and emphasized local church autonomy, an endorsement by the *Standard* was as close to the Texas Baptist stamp of approval as a political campaign could achieve. The editorial, simply titled, "Yes to Proposition No. 3," noted that Texas was the only state in the country with a strict dollar ceiling for welfare payments, and urged state Baptists to remove it. The article acknowledged voter frustration with welfare, saying, "There is a lot that is evil in both policy and administration of our

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[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.
[67]Ibid.
[68]"Texas Cuts Welfare Grant," *New York Times*, March 23, 1971, 21.

welfare programs. Few will argue differently."[69] But such sentiment "must not discourage a 'yes' vote May 18 when Texas should remove the $80 million ceiling on welfare programs."[70] *Standard* editors emphasized that the majority of funds from the Texas welfare program went to elderly citizens and the severely disabled. They also acknowledged the concerns of many Baptists that aid to families with dependent children might encourage premarital sex and more "illegitimate children," as the editorial referred to them. But "our wrath must be confined to the parents and not to the children," they insisted.[71]

Even as they acknowledged frustration with welfare payments to single-parent families, the editors insisted that, "We do not believe that aid for dependent children is a factor in illegitimate births. The $25 per month per child is too small an amount" to encourage women to have more children in order to receive more payments. They also noted that the average number of children for families receiving aid was three, a relatively small number. "Legislation to correct the evils (of the program) is mandatory but, meanwhile, it is not for us to starve the children" the editors concluded.[72] Interestingly, the editorial listed a number of liberal-leaning organizations that had endorsed the bill as evidence that it was worthy of support. These organizations included the Texas Association for Services to Children, the Community Welfare Councils, Texas AFL-CIO, the Hispanic-American Institute, and the Anti-Defamation League. *Standard* editors insisted that these groups were "entirely unselfish in their position" and argued,

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[69]"Editorials: Yes to Proposition No. 3," *Baptist Standard*, May 5, 1971, 4.
[70]Ibid.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Ibid.

"Surely, the support of these organizations would convince the voter of the wisdom in approving Proposition 3."[73] That the official newsmagazine of Texas Baptists, distributed to hundreds of thousands of Baptists every month, would ally with these organizations is further evidence of how different Texas Baptist emphases were than those of the Christian Right.

Not only did the *Standard* and the TCLC promote Proposition 3, but Dunn and Strickland received reasonably positive responses from rank-and-file Texas Baptists. "We got very little organized opposition" from state Baptists, and "since there was little organized opposition with any clear, logical statements against it, we got a pretty good response," Dunn remembered.[74] To promote the issue, the TCLC printed over 250,000 bulletin inserts that "were happily picked up and distributed" by local churches. In a low-turnout special election in May, distributing that much political literature through church bulletins was no small feat. It represented an impressive act of political organization. Indeed, Christian Right leaders adopted similar tactics to promote very different causes in the 1970s and 1980s. Even some Texas Baptists who were considered more conservative than Dunn or *Standard* editors ended up supporting their efforts. The best example is W. A. Criswell, a fiery conservative pastor from the Dallas area. Later in the 1970s he gained notoriety for his insistence on a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and his opposition to political and theological liberalism. But in 1971 he actually supported Proposition 3, even going on TV to discuss why he supported removing the welfare ceiling. Dallas

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[73]Ibid.
[74]Dunn, James Milton. Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1980), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 125.

voters ended up supporting the measure, in part due to Criswell's efforts.[75] That is not to say that every Texas Baptist supported the TCLC's social activism or the *Standard*'s political leanings. In fact, the *Standard* occasionally received letters like a 1972 plea that the paper "would do well to stay out of politics." The letter chastised the *Standard* for "political slanting" that "might offend someone."[76] Another letter attacked the notion that "Mr. Strickland's position with the BGCT Christian Life Commission qualifies him" to discuss politics.[77] But even with occasional complaints like these, the striking thing about the TCLC's welfare campaigns was the lack of serious opposition from Texas Baptists. The *Standard* editorial board continued its work unabated, the TCLC continued to receive generous funding from state churches, and Dunn and Strickland continued to speak out on controversial social issues from their perch of denominational leadership. As the *Standard* and the TCLC led the fight for getting rid of the welfare ceiling, they faced remarkably little opposition from state Baptists. They did, however, end up losing the campaign. In May 1971, Proposition 3 went down to defeat by a 8 point margin, 54 percent to 46 percent.[78]

The defeat of Proposition 3 did little to dampen the enthusiasm of Texas Baptist leadership for political activism. In the 1972 presidential election between incumbent Republican Richard Nixon and Democratic challenger George McGovern, the TCLC publicly encouraged Baptist voters to judge the candidates based on their commitments to the poor and vulnerable. Phil Strickland, the

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[75]Ibid.
[76]Ray W. Paul, letter to the editor, *Baptist Standard*, November 1, 1972, 2.
[77]Robert K. Fowler, letter to the editor, *Baptist Standard*, November 1, 1972, 2.
[78]Bill Kovachs, "States Act to Curb Welfare Expansion: States Moving to Reverse Wide Expansion of the Nation," *New York Times*, August 16, 1971, 1.

TCLC associate who played a crucial role in its welfare campaigns, set the tone for the debate by publishing an article in the *Baptist Standard*, with the full support of the publication's editors. In an article titled, "Welfare: What Attitude,?" Strickland published a defense of welfare that would be difficult to find today even in the pages of the country's most liberal magazines. His article was nothing less than a full-throated endorsement of public welfare and a refutation of some of the most common arguments against it.[79]

Strickland published the article as part of a series the editors ran on "topics of Christian concern."[80] He began by focusing on the biblical basis for helping the poor, citing Proverbs 82:3 ("Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy"), Proverbs 14:21 ("Blessed is he that considereth the poor"), Proverbs 21:13 ("Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself, but shall not be heard"), and Matthew 25:45 ("Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me").[81] For Strickland, these verses and others provided a clear message to Christians: "The biblical concern for the poor rings loud and clear . . . One cannot love and at the same time ignore human hunger of suffering."[82]

Strickland took on some of the typical arguments against welfare on a point-by-point basis, insisting that "A lack of factual information" led to "much misunderstanding" about programs to help the poor.[83] He directly attacked the notion that welfare payments mostly aided African Americans or that "welfare

[79]Phil Strickland, "Welfare: What Attitude?" *Baptist Standard*, October 6, 1969, 9.
[80]Ibid.
[81]Ibid.
[82]Ibid.
[83]Ibid.

children are illegitimate." Strickland cited a recent study showing that white Americans made up the largest racial group using welfare and that over 70 percent of children on welfare were "legitimate" (to use Strickland's outdated phrase).[84] Strickland also addressed the common perception that employable males made up a large portion of the welfare population and that cheating was a major problem within the system. He noted that less that 1 percent of welfare recipients were "able-bodied males" and that a recent review of the program concluded that only 0.4 percent of welfare cases showed any indication of fraud.[85] Finally, Strickland disputed the notion that people frequently stayed on welfare for many years without ever intending to work, sometimes becoming fairly well-off in the process. He cited studies showing that the majority of welfare recipients had received assistance for less than two years. He also noted that it would be incredibly difficult to live an opulent lifestyle on $300 per month (the average payment to a family of four).[86]

Strickland encouraged Baptists to assess the Nixon and McGovern candidacies in light of their views on welfare and their emphasis on helping the poor. He highlighted the fact that both candidates supported "providing a minimum income for those who cannot work."[87] But he clearly preferred McGovern's program to Nixon's. Starting in 1969, Nixon had begun advocating a yearly payment of up to $2,400 for a family of four in need of assistance. But he tied this proposal to his insistence that the food stamp program be discontinued.

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[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid.
[86]Ibid.
[87]Ibid.

Strickland believed that the overall effect of his program would be "a significant cut in welfare recipients in at least 45 states."[88] Strickland much preferred McGovern's proposal, which was the establishment (through increased Social Security payments, food stamps, and welfare benefits) of a basic level of support of $4,000 a year for a family of four. In the heat of a campaign in which McGovern was often derided as too liberal in his concern for the poor, the TCLC defended not just McGovern but the very idea that government should use its power to help disadvantaged families. Noting "the tragedy . . . that individuals and social institutions, such as the church, have failed to assume the responsibility" to care for society's poor, Strickland disputed the notion that "welfare should not be the responsibility of the federal government."[89]

Linking his political statements with Baptist faith, Strickland concluded that "one of the greatest needs" for Christians was to "seek out those who have not been so fortunate as we have and begin to learn again what it means to express the love of Christ to such persons."[90] Nixon, of course, went on to win a landslide of epic proportions, cementing in many people's minds that advocating for the poor was not a wise political strategy. Today, even liberal-leaning politicians shy away from direct advocacy of the kind that Strickland embraced, much less his open defense of welfare. But in embracing McGovern's policies and defending welfare payments to the poor, Strickland was only following in the footsteps of other Texas Baptist leaders in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only that, but he did so with the full editorial approval of the *Baptist Standard*, from his position of

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[88]Ibid.
[89]Ibid.
[90]Ibid.

denominational leadership that was annually approved by the state's membership.

Although the domestic policy prescriptions of Texas Baptists are probably the most striking part of their activism, they certainly did not limit their activities to the United States. At the 1974 state Baptist convention, the TCLC issued its annual report. The document emphasized not just domestic poverty but also elevated "world hunger to a major concern and called upon Christians to assume their responsibility for feeding those who starve."[91] The report began by emphasizing the dire nature of the problem, noting that 200 to 400 million people "will stare starvation directly into the face this year," and that "more than 10 million persons, most of them children five years of age or under, will perish as a direct result of too little food to eat."[92] The report intoned, "In light of the urgent need and clear scriptural teaching, we must assume our Christian responsibility."[93] While many conservative denominations dealt with poverty on a religious level, encouraging its members to individually help the poor, Texas Baptists stood out because their activism was geared specifically towards governmental action. "We challenge every citizen to urge congressional representatives and senators to pass responsible legislation immediately," the report implored. The only proper response was for government to "reorder economic priorities to provide a continuing system for world hunger relief."[94] Once again, Texas Baptists embraced a more active federal government, arguing that

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[91]"Convention: Elevates World Hunger As a Concern," *Baptist Standard*, November 4, 1974, 4.
[92]Ibid.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid.

it should use its power on behalf of the disadvantaged, not just in the United States but all around the world.

A slew of recent works has emphasized how the economic views of southern whites made it easier for Republicans to gain a foothold in the South and created a political culture that was so conservative that even the best Democratic candidates could not hope for much in the South.[95] But this current research does not reach back to cover the experience of Texas Baptists in the 1960s and 1970s. Their views on economic policy, the poor, and government's role in helping the disadvantaged all led them away from, not towards, an alliance with conservatives and the Republican Party. The Baptist General Convention of Texas was and is the largest statewide organization of southern evangelicals in the country, so it is difficult to write off their experiences when examining the broader currents of American politics and religion after 1960. Without question, many northern transplants to the South found easy alliance with the emerging conservative movement, and many of them already had some identification with the Republican Party. But for many white southerners, especially those with a historic connection to the Democratic Party and a pattern of supporting liberal economic programs, the gradual shift towards conservative politics was not inevitable, and it certainly was not easy. Not only that, but for Texas Baptists, the depth of their religious commitment actually led them away from conservative politics and towards a more activist view of the federal government.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Texas Baptist politics consisted of opposing

[95]Kruse, *White Flight*, and Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, are two of the most compelling.

governmental activism if it intruded into the realm of personal religious belief or action. But they embraced it when it meant alleviating suffering, promoting literacy, or providing much-needed assistance to poor families. To put it bluntly, their view of the federal government was the exact opposite of the Christian Right's, which emphasized a strong role for the government in private affairs but rejected the notion that it could alleviate poverty or improve the material lives of its citizens. For historians seeking to understand the place of white southerners in the changing political landscape of the 1960s and 1970s, the experience of Texas Baptists is instructive. It reminds us that while some white southerners merged easily with the Christian Right and the GOP, others did not. The activism of Texas Baptists presents a much more complicated picture of southern religion and Baptist politics than historians have previously assumed. It should give pause to historians whose work has implied that the southern transition to Republican politics was inevitable and unavoidable.

Chapter 6

An "Embarrassing Question": Texas Baptist Leaders and Race Relations, 1950-1985

In February 1972 editors of the *Baptist Standard* ran a provocative editorial titled, "Embarrassing Question" in the opening pages of the paper. They did so in advance of that year's "Race Relations Sunday," an event Southern Baptists began celebrating in 1968 as an expression of hope for progress on racial issues.[1] "What if we had church and EVERYBODY came?" they asked. "The question is simple, but the answer is disturbing."[2] The intent of the editors was clear: to point out that racial segregation, although legally outlawed in schools and public accommodations, was alive and well in the pews of Southern Baptist churches. They went on to paint a dire picture of racial progress and to encourage Baptists to make their congregations more racially inclusive. "It is not enough to congratulate ourselves that as Christians we are making progress towards closing the gap in our attitudes and our practices," the article warned. "The racial barrier is down in thousands of our churches but many which pride themselves on this have not rolled out the welcome mat."[3] The editors worried that, despite progress, churches continued to tolerate and perpetuate discrimination: "Some will accept the black but not the brown. For others, it is the

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[1]"Editorials: Embarrassing Question," *Baptist Standard*, February 2, 1972, 6.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid.

Indian or the Asian who recognizes hostility when he is in a minority."[4] Besides subtle prejudice at churches that were trying to move forward on racial issues, the *Standard* also worried that old-school bigotry would weaken even these minimal efforts. "Our major problem, to be sure, is in churches which ignore the New Testament teaching of brotherhood and of respect for all people," they insisted. "They scream the loudest in disagreement and they make the headlines. One church slamming the door in a black face does more damage than a dozen churches can do good as they open wide their doors."[5] The editors encouraged Texas Baptists to "implement Christ's teachings" by pushing their churches and pastors to adopt racially inclusive practices. They even noted that the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC) sent packets to every church that could help pastors put such policies into place. After encouraging readers to work for these goals, *Standard* editors concluded by stating, "Texas Baptists probably have the greatest of all opportunities to show the Christian way in race relations."[6]

This 1972 editorial demonstrates an important difference between Texas Baptists and the early organizers of the Christian Right: their handling of the issue of race. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Texas Baptist leadership remained committed to racial progressivism and took a great deal of political heat for their strong stance in favor of complete integration in the South. Not only were they passionate supporters of nearly every liberal political effort to advance the cause of African American rights, they were also religiously committed to integrating the Southern Baptist Convention and putting their denomination firmly

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[4]Ibid.
[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid.

on the side of civil rights. The depth of their commitment to racial liberalism might be startling for contemporary readers who are accustomed to thinking of Southern Baptists as part of the conservative coalition that exploited racial fears for political gain in the 1960s and 1970s. But the work of Texas Baptists during those years paints a much different, more complicated picture of white evangelical reaction to the coming of civil rights.

A number of recent works has demonstrated the importance of race as a motivating issue for southern conservatives in their shift to the Republican Party after 1960. Scholars like Dan Carter, Joseph Crespino, and Paul Harvey have written extensively on the subject.[7] While it would be too simplistic to say that race was the only issue motivating southern conservatives to reject the Democratic Party and embrace hyper-conservative politics, there is little doubt that it was a major factor. In general, the scholarship has painted a picture of southern evangelicals resisting desegregation, avoiding the religious entreaties of African American ministers to embrace equality, and eventually developing a politics of economic conservatism that rejected calls for black advancement and protected white privilege. In short, the story of white evangelicals and race in the 1960s and 1970s has been a mostly negative one.

But the scholarship on the New Right and southern politics has been too quick to assume a monolithic reaction among white, southern evangelicals to

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[7]For more on this scholarship, see Chapter One, pgs 28-30. Also see Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1995); Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

changes in the region's racial order. In Texas, home to the largest state convention of Southern Baptists in the country, Baptists pursued a far different course on race relations than many of their counterparts did elsewhere in the South. Not only did they accommodate the end of segregation but they embraced the cause of true integration, in society at large and in their churches. Their handling of race controversies in these years might be surprising for contemporary readers, but for Texas Baptists it was merely an expression of their deeply held religious beliefs and a basic requirement of their Baptist faith. The racial progressivism of Texas Baptist leaders is one important reason that they found the Christian Right such an unnatural fit during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Just as with social activism, gender politics, and the separation of church and state, issues of race drove a clear wedge between an emergent Christian Right and Southern Baptists in Texas. While the Christian Right refused to embrace racial justice as a primary concern, Texas Baptists remained firmly committed not just to integration but to racial uplift and African American advancement. The story of Texas Baptists during these crucial years should trouble scholars who have assumed cohesiveness among white evangelicals and encourage a broader examination of southern religion's role in shaping national politics.

As with other social issues like poverty and education, the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC) shaped the Texas Baptist response to racial controversies. The commission was led by racial liberals during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, which allowed the TCLC to take the lead in pushing Texas

Baptists towards accepting the end of segregation and even promoting an agenda aimed at racial integration in Southern Baptist churches. Foy Valentine, the prominent Texas pastor who became known for his vocal stance on church/state separation and poverty relief programs, took over the TCLC in 1953. Although he did not know it at the time, he would end up leading the organization through some of the most tumultuous racial changes the state of Texas and the country had ever witnessed. Just one year into his term, the Supreme Court issued its famous *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, outlawing public school segregation in a shocking unanimous verdict.[8] Having been raised in segregated Texas and (by his own admission) exposed to vicious racism among family members and friends, Valentine was not the likeliest person to place Texas Baptists on a trajectory of racial liberalism. But perhaps because of that background, he was uniquely qualified to speak with authority to his fellow Texas Baptists, arguing for acceptance of federally mandated integration in public facilities and racial reforms within the Baptist General Convention of Texas itself.

After spending his childhood in segregated East Texas, Valentine came to Baylor University to pursue degrees in Bible and English, both of which he viewed as preparation for the ministry. His understanding of race relations expanded during his time at Baylor, and he became convinced that Southern Baptists ought to move away from their history of racism. But it was not until he attended Southwestern Seminary in the mid-1940s that Valentine fully committed

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[8]For more on the *Brown* decision, see James T. Patterson, *Brown vs. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown vs. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage, 2004); and Michael J. Klarman, *Brown vs. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

himself to the cause of racial equality. Southwestern was and is the largest Baptist seminary in Texas and one of the best-known Baptist seminaries in the world. Although fundamentalists managed to take control of the seminary in the 1980s, for most of its history it served as a home to moderate and (in a few cases) liberal Baptist professors who advocated for integration both in public spaces and in the Southern Baptist Convention. At Southwestern, Valentine met Dr. T. B. Maston, a professor of Christian ethics who by that time was known in Baptist circles for his racial liberalism and his emphasis on social issues.[9] To Valentine, Maston's mentorship was crucial: "He took time to relate to students, he was in touch with social reality, he knew what was going on in the world, he introduced us to the structures of society, he acquainted us with the NAACP, to the Urban League--- to help our work in the community."[10] Under Maston's guidance, Valentine became a vocal advocate of black equality and an ardent supporter of integration in the South. He also became convinced that Southern Baptists had played a role in promoting segregation and resolved to change the direction of the denomination. To that end, he spent a year of his time in graduate school working with Texas Baptist churches to promote racial cooperation, particularly in the area of religion. He hosted numerous interracial revival meetings, helped found a Baptist student ministry at Prairie View College (now called Prairie View A and M University), one of the largest historically black colleges in Texas, and helped organize youth events that brought together

[9]For more on Maston, see John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 1986), 119-121, 130-137, and 185-86.

[10]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine, Volume I. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 1990), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 78.

African American and white college students. He was so moved by the possibility of racial change that he ultimately wrote his doctoral dissertation on the subject. His dissertation, titled "A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations from 1917 to 1947," examined interactions between white and black Southern Baptists and the role white Baptists played in resisting changes to the Jim Crow system.[11]

Following his time at seminary, Valentine was surprised to learn that, on Dr. Maston's recommendation, many influential Texas Baptists were pushing for him to take a role as the director of the Texas Christian Life Commission. After some soul-searching, he decided that the position was right for him, particularly given his desire to push for a stronger emphasis on racial and economic justice among Texas Baptists. In 1953 he formally accepted the position. In early 1954 Valentine began leading a conference series that he held in various Baptist churches, exploring the legacy of racism in the South and encouraging church members to support racial equality.[12] Valentine could not have picked a timelier topic to begin his work with the TCLC because, of course, that same year witnessed the Supreme Court's monumental ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.[13] For Valentine, the ruling brought race relations to the forefront of Texas Baptist life, giving him the perfect opportunity to make a comprehensive

[11]Valentine, Foy. "A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations" (ThD dissertation, Southwestern Seminary, 1949).
[12]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine, Volume I. Interview by Daniel B. McGee and Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 1990), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 100-102.
[13]Patterson, 3.

case for what he called "Christian social ethics."[14] The *Baptist Standard* had already gone on record in support of the idea that "Baptists must be involved in social issues, as well as evangelism."[15]

In general, the legacy of racism and the prospect of school integration provided him a platform with which to convince his fellow Texas Baptists that they needed to be more active on the social aspects of the gospel. To do that, Valentine had to deal with the white racism that was prevalent in much of the state. *Brown* "was violently disagreed with in East Texas, which culturally reflected the racism of the Deep South," Valentine remembered.[16] But even with those feelings, Valentine never viewed his state or his state Baptist convention as being quite as agitated about integration as many other parts of the South. "My judgment is . . . it (*Brown*) was not the end of the world for the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission by any stretch of the imagination," he insisted. "With our Spanish-American influences in South Texas and some of West Texas, there was simply not the feeling that everything that had been nailed down was coming loose in Texas that was found in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia."[17] Perhaps because of that different racial climate, Valentine was able to establish a legacy of civil rights advocacy among Texas Baptists that distinguished them from their counterparts in other southern states and ultimately brought them into conflict with the burgeoning movement of

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[14]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine, Volume I. Interview by Daniel B. McGee and Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 1990), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 101.
[15]David Gardner, "Timely Issues," *Baptist Standard*, Jun 13, 1953, 6.
[16]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine, Volume I. Interview by Daniel B. McGee and Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 1990), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 100.
[17]Ibid.

religious conservatives known as the Christian Right.

One of Valentine's primary roles as director of the TCLC was to respond to the backlash against the *Brown* decision among conservative whites in Texas. As in many other southern states, Texas legislators responded to the Supreme Court decision with a rash of proposed bills that would prevent integration of the public schools in any way possible. Valentine described the mood of the South following *Brown*: "After 1954, the state legislatures in the South nearly all started passing little racist legislation on their own; and the people were told by the White Citizens Councils that they didn't have to obey the law and that the Supreme Court was made up of communists, and that this was all a communist plot to bring about an amalgamation of the races."[18] Given the virulent reaction against any form of integration and the history of tacit acceptance of segregation among Southern Baptists, Valentine could easily have pushed the TCLC towards activism on other, less controversial issues like gambling, alcohol abuse, or even church/state separation. But his training in Christian social ethics and the commitment to racial equality that he developed at Southwestern led him to a bolder course of action. He ultimately placed the TCLC (and, by extension, the Baptist General Convention of Texas) on record in opposition to segregation. As he put it, "We had to oppose that early manifestation of the new racism legislatively, educationally, and in the churches by preaching, writing, and every way that we could."[19]

Valentine was fortunate that his efforts to oppose this "new racism" were

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[18]Ibid., 106-107.
[19]Ibid., 107.

not the first Texas Baptists attempts at moderation on issues of race. Immediately following the *Brown* decision, the *Baptist Standard* ran an article by its editor at the time, David Gardner. Gardner was not as emphatic as Valentine in pushing for advances in racial equality, but he was very clearly a moderate who saw no wisdom in continued opposition to change. "Whatever one feels, it (*Brown*) is now the law of the land, a fact we which we must face and adjust ourselves to as good citizens and loyal Americans."[20] Typical of Texas Baptists, Gardner (and, by extension, the editorial board of the *Standard*) was most worried that the coming of integration would cause whites to abandon public schools. He condemned the efforts of some pro-segregationist forces to end public education as "unthinkable." He called for Texas Baptists to work with anyone who was willing to focus on "saving our free public school system."[21]

Not only did Valentine have like-minded people in leadership at the state level, but he also had an ally in the national Southern Baptist Convention. Although rank-and-file Southern Baptists have received some of the worst depictions in the scholarship on racial change (and for good reason), historians have tended to ignored the fact that Southern Baptists at the national level often pushed for racial equality. At the 1956 annual convention of the SBC, the organizers asked T. B. Maston, Valentine's mentor at Southwestern Seminary, to deliver an address on race relations. Since Maston had been active on issues of racial justice for years, convention leaders could hardly have been surprised by the tenor of his speech. He gave a passionate appeal for "Christian activism that

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[20]David Gardner, "Changes Coming," *Baptist Standard*, June 11, 1954, 2.
[21]Ibid.

changes the racial situation for the better" and called integration of public schools "a necessity." He declared that it would be "tragic" for "the churches in the South to place the stamp of divine approval upon social customs and traditional modes of behavior that fall short of the spirit and teachings of Jesus."[22] Not only did Maston speak at the convention, but the SBC commissioned him to write a short book on the subject of racial change, simply titled *Integration*. The book was merely a fuller version of his convention speech, and it was decidedly liberal in outlook. In it, Maston forcefully endorsed the cause of integration, insisted upon its inevitability in the South, encouraged Baptists to welcome black children into public schools, and even suggested that Baptist churches should play a role in easing the transition to integration.[23] That such a prominent Texas Baptist would publicly advocate for racial justice in this way is an indication that, at least in the 1950s, the national denomination had not yet shifted to ardent conservatism on racial issues.

The primary focus of Valentine's efforts was the education of Texas Baptists about the treatment of African Americans, the need for improved race relations, and the urgency of achieving political equality for the black community. To accomplish this goal, he organized annual (sometimes biannual) conferences that he designed as a means of educating Texas Baptists about social issues and encouraging them to bring activism back to their local churches. Typically held at Southwestern Seminary or Baylor University, the purpose of these conferences was "to help set the tone and raise the level of consciousness with

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[22]T. B. Maston, "Southern Baptists and the Negro," May 1956, printed copy from the Maston Collection, Southern Baptist Library and Historical Archives.
[23]T. B. Maston, *Integration* (Nashville: Christian Life Commission, 1956).

regard to Christian social ethics."[24] They seem to have been successful in that goal. When he began holding the conferences, only 14 associational Christian life committees existed at local churches. By 1960, there were 110.[25] The conferences dealt with a range of social issues, but they gave special emphasis to the topic of race; one conference even focused exclusively on that issue, examining "Christianity and Race Relations" in seminars and lectures.[26] Besides his efforts at educating Texas Baptists, Valentine also used his position with the TCLC to lobby the Texas legislature against bills aimed at preserving segregation. His goal was "to try to position ourselves (Texas Baptists) against some of the racist legislation that the legislators put through or tried to put through for public consumption so they could be seen as voting for the preservation of segregation."[27] To no one's surprise, Texas Baptists received a cold response from most legislators, routinely enduring "some abuse in the legislative hearings from the people that would fight us . . . who expected this sort of defense of their prejudices."[28]

To demonstrate the kind of opposition pro-integration Texas Baptists faced, Valentine was fond of telling one story. Not long after the *Brown* decision, he boarded a plane and was stopped by a member of the White Citizens Council, who recognized Valentine. The man walked over to him and said, "We could

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[24]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine, Volume I. Interview by Daniel B. McGee and Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 1990), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 107.
[25]Storey, 155.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Valentine, Foy Dan. Oral Memoirs of Foy Dan Valentine, Volume I. Interview by Daniel B. McGee and Thomas L. Charlton. (Texas Baptist Oral History Consortium, 1990), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 106.
[28]Ibid.

solve this problem if it weren't for you preachers. If you would stay quiet about it, we could get it worked out."[29] He followed that statement up by noting, "My minister has taken an ideal position on this issue: he has never once even mentioned it."[30] Valentine took pride in this resistance, seeing it as the natural result of pushing for societal change from a Christian perspective. In 1960 he resigned his position as executive director of the Christian Life Commission to lead the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the national political arm of the Southern Baptist Convention.[31] It was in that role that he gained the most notoriety, pursuing an agenda of economic and racial activism that cheered liberal and moderate Baptists and frustrated the fundamentalists who would eventually seize control of the convention. Valentine left the TCLC with a legacy of agitation on racial issues that his predecessors would continue; that activism helps explain why Texas Baptist leaders were so reluctant to make common cause with the Christian Right as it emerged during the 1970s.

That tradition of activism on racial issues continued in the SBC, not only through Valentine's successors at the TCLC but also in the pages of the *Baptist Standard*. E. S. James, best known for his ardent support of church/state separation, became editor of the *Standard* in 1954, the same year the *Brown* decision forever changed southern politics. When James took over at the *Standard*, he was nowhere near as racially progressive as his counterparts at the TCLC or in the leadership of the national convention. By his own account, he had accepted the racial system in the South: living in "a culture where segregation

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[29]Ibid., 111.
[30]Ibid.
[31]Storey, 123.

was practiced . . . we thought little about it until circumstances forced it upon our attention."[32] Ultimately, though, James transitioned to a more liberal stance in the mid-1960s, largely due to his Baptist faith. He concluded that a person could not "be a segregationist and be the kind of Christian I ought to be."[33]

After his conversion to the cause of civil rights, James became adamant about the need to quickly extend rights to African Americans and move away from the South's segregationist past. In 1963 he wrote a *Standard* editorial in which he laid out his views on race more clearly than he had previously done. "It is unacceptable that representatives of religion" have "to be reminded of their moral duty by representatives of government," he declared. "With the exception of the Christian Life Commission and the men who work with them, how many of us have ever really risked our necks in defense of the Negro's rights?"[34] He could scarcely have been more condemnatory of Baptists who defended segregation and "hurl(ed) epithets at the Court."[35] He pointedly insisted, "If Jesus were here in the flesh there is no doubt that He would defend the rights of the downtrodden just as He did when He was here. As His followers, we can do no less."[36] Later that year, when Baylor University formally desegregated, James praised the university for its "responsible actions."[37] In 1964, following Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act, James argued that Christians who insisted on opposing the law were making a major mistake. "No Christian has a moral right

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[32]James, E. S. Oral Memoirs of E. S. James. Interview by Thomas L. Charlton. (August 5, 1971), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 89-90.
[33]Ibid.
[34]E. S. James, "More Must Be Done," *Baptist Standard*, June 26, 1963, 4.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.
[37]E. S. James, "Baylor Moves Forward," *Baptist Standard*, August 29, 1963, 4.

to disobey any law of his nation" aside from religious objections, he wrote. "And there is nothing in this new law that in any measure prevents one's full devotion to God."[38] James also steadfastly refused to print any pro-segregation articles, arguing that it would have been inappropriate since the Supreme Court had already ruled segregation illegal.[39] James' advocacy for civil rights was crucial because it demonstrated that leaders at the TCLC like Valentine were not alone in their fight for racial justice. On the contrary, they had the institutional support of the Texas Baptist leadership, including the editorial board at the *Standard*.

Before leaving the TCLC, Valentine handpicked his successor, choosing a young minister, Jimmy Allen, to replace him. Allen, already a staff member, believed strongly in Christian social activism and shared Valentine's political orientation. Like Valentine, Allen's background did not seem to foretell his extensive involvement with racial justice and civil rights agitation. Born in Hope, Arkansas, Allen ended up moving to south Dallas in the 1920s where his father took the pastorate at a Baptist church. It was in Dallas that Allen first remembered being exposed to the brutality of southern racism and the devastating effects of segregation. By his own recollection, "There was a great degree of racism and race hatred in my background."[40] As a child, he even went so far as to read a pro-segregation history of white supremacist politics that "colored my thinking about the Ku Klux Klan at that time so that I really accepted

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[38]E. S. James, "Changes," *Baptist Standard*, April 4, 1964, 4.
[39]E.S. James, "Editorial Policy," *Baptist Standard*, April 22, 1964.
[40]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 18.

it as being true."[41] As a 16 year old, Allen participated in a mission trip that took him to Americus, Georgia, where he attended the Young Men's Mission Conference. At the event, he met Clarence Jordan, founder of the Koinonia Farm and one of the country's most dedicated advocates for black equality.[42] To put it mildly, Allen's first real exposure to racial liberalism did not go over well. "I was very angry at Clarence Jordan; I was in his class every day," Allen remembers. "We argued the whole time. I took a totally segregationist posture."[43]

Having been raised by a segregationist father who "thought Negroes ought to stay in their place" and a mother who "didn't think a Negro had a soul," it is probably not surprising that Allen had a viscerally negative reaction to Jordan's pro-equality stance.[44] But Jordan's message influenced Allen, despite his hostility to it. "Clarence Jordan hit me . . . with the demands of the Christian ethic," Allen recalled. "And it was years later before I communicated with Clarence how much he helped me, but he really shook me up. And I left for home there very angry about what he had said but unable to get away from the logic of it."[45] But although the seed had been planted, it was not until his college years that Allen finally realized that his racism "was a pattern of concern for my own life."[46] Allen would eventually develop a profound commitment to civil rights, breaking with his segregationist past and joining the chorus of Americans insisting on an end to the

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[41]Ibid., 33.
[42]For further reading on Clarence Jordan and Koinonia, see Ann Louis Coble, *Cotton Patch for the Kingdom: Clarence Jordan's Demonstration Plot at Koinonia Farm* (New York: Helard Press, 2001).
[43]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 18.
[44]Ibid., 32-33.
[45]Ibid., 33.
[46]Ibid.

Jim Crow system that divided black from white and denied opportunity to African Americans.

Upon finishing high school, Allen enrolled at Howard Payne University, a Baptist liberal arts college in Brownwood, Texas. Initially, he was much more attracted to the student revival movement than to liberal politics. Like many young Baptists, he saw evangelism and missions as the primary emphases of Christian theology and gave little thought to issues of social justice. But his years at Southwestern Seminary forever changed his outlook on racial issues. His transformation began with one of his first experiences as a young pastor (at this time, nearly all seminary students also worked as pastors to fund their graduate education). The year was 1951, and Allen had not yet become active on issues of racial justice. But when he became pastor of First Baptist Church in Van Alstyne, Texas, he inherited one project from the previous pastor: a planned interracial service with a local black church. At the time, Allen did not view the event as an attack on segregation as a political system but simply a religious event that he was called upon to organize. His partners in organizing the event were a black Baptist pastor and a white Methodist minister, whose congregation would be hosting the event. Since Methodists had a reputation for being more liberal on racial issues than Baptists, Allen expected little resistance to the type of religiously themed event they were planning.[47] But as soon as he began organizing the event, a deacon at the Methodist church approached him with this message: "This is not the way I feel; I do not think this service is wise. Our

[47]For more information on Methodists and racial issues in the 1950s, see Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

denomination, though, has been on record being for this and the community is planning it. Therefore, I don't see how we can avoid doing this."[48] Despite the opposition, the service turned out to be a huge success; and it convinced Allen that Southern Baptists ought to be more active in pursuing racial justice and working with African American churches on religious issues. As he put it, "It reinforced me in a realization that this was really where the vacuum was in Southern Baptist life and that something had to be done about it."[49] He ultimately changed the focus of his studies to Christian ethics and became one of the strongest Southern Baptist advocates for racial equality.

That experience was in the back of Allen's mind as the Southern Baptist Convention debated the *Brown* decision at its 1954 annual meeting in St. Louis, Missouri. Allen, of course, was not yet director of the TCLC, but he had switched his doctoral focus to ethics and had finally broken with his segregationist past. He attended the convention "as a young field hog greatly convinced that we ought to politic as strongly as possible to get the convention on record behind the Supreme Court decision."[50] Given the reputation of Southern Baptists for backwardness on race relations, modern observers might be surprised to learn not only that there was a discussion about race at the 1954 convention, but that Allen's side was victorious in passing a resolution supporting the *Brown* decision. In fact, the resolution passed overwhelmingly.[51] Not surprisingly, the resolution's source was the national office of the Christian Life Commission, which by that

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[48]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 93.
[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid., 95.
[51]Michael E. Williams and Walter B. Shurden, *Turning Points in Baptist History* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 262.

time was already known for its efforts to pull the denomination in a liberal direction on racial and economic issues. The resolution was unequivocal in its support for racial progress, insisting upon "the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens . . . with the Christian principles of equal justice and love for all men."[52] It called for Baptists to "use their leadership in positive thought and planning to the end that this crisis in our national history shall not be made the occasion for new and bitter prejudices, but a movement toward a united nation."[53] The vote passed by an overwhelming margin, an accomplishment that Allen celebrated. "I think it was one of the most significant decisions that Southern Baptists made in the decade," he remembered. "Because if we had gone on record in the other direction . . . the robbing of the local church of what I discovered in Van Alstyne, which was denominational witness, would have devastated us."[54] Despite the pledge of support from the national convention, many local churches resisted their denomination's support for school integration, and Allen's church fell into this camp. When he returned from the convention and presented the resolution, along with an explanation of why it was needed, the response was mostly hostile. But after further explanation and several difficult conversations, a majority of the church at least let the issue die down, with some members even embracing the change. Allen thought the entire process was "very healthy" and took a lesson from it: "If you are in a highly prejudiced culture but you have a real love for your folks and they have a confidence in you, they will

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[52]Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 44.
[53]Ibid.
[54]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 95.

either listen to you and believe you or they will respect you."[55] That lesson would serve Allen well in his leadership at the TCLC, where he had more difficult conversations and continued to press his denomination to stand on the side of racial justice.

As with his predecessor, Allen benefited from institutional support for racial equality among the Texas Baptist leadership, particularly the editors at the *Standard*. John Hurt, who had replaced E. S. James as editor, was a staunch (if also cautious) ally to the TCLC. He went on record in several editorials urging Christians in the South to embrace the cause of civil rights and attacking those who continued to resist integration.[56] In one of his most pointed editorials, he sarcastically noted of Southern Baptists, "We are attacking racial barriers in the churches with the effectiveness of a slingshot assault on Gibraltar."[57] He routinely criticized opponents of integration and insisted that a proper Christian response to the issue was not only accommodation to racial change, but advocacy for it. Having the support of the *Standard* no doubt made Allen's job easier, though he still faced significant opposition from some rank-and-file Texas Baptists.

But it is important to understand that Allen did not only have the institutional support of Texas Baptists; he was in sync with the national leadership of Southern Baptists well into the 1970s. In 1968 Southern Baptists held their annual convention in Houston. Texans had a disproportionate impact

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[55]Ibid.
[56]For examples, see John Hurt, "Topics of Interest," *Baptist Standard*, July 7, 1967, 4; John Hurt, "More Controversy," *Baptist Standard*, September 12, 1967, 4.
[57]John Hurt, "King Dead," *Baptist Standard*, April 24, 1968.

on the convention, as 25 percent of the attendees were Texas Baptists.[58] Much of the convention debate centered on a race relations resolution that Foy Valentine and the Christian Life Commission were pushing. Titled, "A Statement Concerning the Crisis of Our Nation," the resolution was a full-throated endorsement of integration and a call for Southern Baptists to stand clearly against those still holding out for a segregationist South. Although it touched on other topics, the main focus of the resolution was resolving the problem of race relations. T. B. Maston insisted that "No action at the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston was more significant than the adoption" of Valentine's resolution.[59] "Some of us believe that this action represents the turning of an important corner for our convention," he wrote.[60] John Hurt and the *Baptist Standard* also endorsed the resolution, deeming it the most important order of business for the convention.[61] Texas Baptists were not the only ones who supported the resolution: It passed by a vote of 5,687 to 2,119 (73 percent to 27 percent).[62] The support for Valentine's efforts at racial justice was another reminder that Texas Baptists like Valentine and Allen were not operating in a political vacuum. Indeed, until fundamentalists gained control of the convention in 1985 (see Chapter Three), their views were dominant among the national leadership.

It was not long after taking leadership of the TCLC that Allen realized he would have to confront the issue of race relations head on. He took the position

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[58]Storey, 196.
[59]T. B. Maston, "Statement of Concern," *Baptist Press*, August 8, 1968, 29, courtesy of the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.
[60]Ibid.
[61]John Hurt, "Convention Notes," *Baptist Standard*, June 19, 1968, 6.
[62]Maston, "Statement of Concern," 29.

in 1960 at a time when much of the South (and some of the North) was in turmoil over federal court orders to desegregate public schools. Allen described it this way: "We were at the point where the whole school desegregation thing was now moved away from decisions in Washington down into our communities and we had to help our pastors to understand how to relate to that explosive emotional issue."[63] To accomplish that goal, Allen led the TCLC in setting up a conference, sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, to be held in the summer of 1962. The focus of the conference would be on bringing African Americans and whites together to overcome racial divisions and to facilitate a peaceful transition to integration. To say that the tenor of the conference was more racially liberal than people normally expected from Southern Baptists would probably be a huge understatement. The *Baptist Standard* called it "a positive step towards working through the racial problems we have,"[64] but the conference certainly dealt with racial issues in a more forthright way than Texas Baptists were accustomed to. Guy Moore, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Forth Worth, led a seminar on preparing local communities for school integration. The superintendent of Fort Worth schools happened to be a member of Moore's church, which he mentioned in his remarks. To Allen's recollection, the main point of the seminar was to explore "the role of pastors in desegregation" in light of the fact that "school integration's gonna happen; we must find ways to cushion

[63]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 95, 117.
[64]"Positive Work Being Done," *Baptist Standard*, June 12, 1962, 3.

this shock."[65] To examine the subject further, Allen brought in pastors from Little Rock, Arkansas, who could speak about the impact of the famous Little Rock Nine's successful desegregation of Central High School. In Allen's view, the seminar was simply an exercise in preparedness, his own liberal views on race notwithstanding. A reporter for the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* saw it differently, and Allen woke up the next day to the following headline: "Baptists Attack Fort Worth School Board."[66] The headline was somewhat misleading, as the article was mostly just a summary of the conference's proceedings, but it stirred controversy nonetheless.

Apparently, members of the Fort Worth School Board had taken issue with some of Moore's statements, particularly his insistence that the school board make their intentions known on the subject of integration. Their goal had been to resist integration at all costs but to avoid publicity on the subject, and the TCLC's conference was a direct attack on that strategy. On the morning the *Star Telegram* published its article, Allen had to deal with backlash from local Southern Baptists. The most vocal critic was Fred Swank, pastor of Singamore Baptist Church in Fort Worth, who greeted Allen at the campus of Southwestern Seminary with an angry message. Swank was livid about the newspaper article and insistent that Allen shut down the conference to avoid further controversy. He had heard from several members of his congregation who thought the conference was pushing school integration and did not want Texas Baptists

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[65]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 117.
[66]Jim Jones, "Baptists Attack Fort Worth School Board," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 6, 1962, 5.

affiliated with that cause. Allen's response was simple: "No, Fred, we're not going to close the thing down. We're here because we ought to be here doing this."[67] At that point, Swank insisted that Allen make a statement "that you're talking just for yourself; you're not talking for me, you're not talking for Baptists."[68] Allen, of course, was a strong defender of "soul liberty," the Baptist idea that each individual is responsible for her or his own theologies and philosophies. So he had no problem fulfilling Swank's request. At the beginning of the conference that day, Allen made the following statement: "I've been requested by a Fort Worth pastor to clarify with everybody here that we are a group of Baptists speaking for ourselves, trying to discover the mind of God on this question, and that we're not speaking for anybody else. We speak to the conscience of Baptists, not for them."[69] Allen's statement did not put an end to the controversy, and Swank continued to press the issue. Ultimately, Swank involved Paige Patterson, a leading Texas fundamentalist and a staunch opponent of Southern Baptist moderates like Allen. Patterson convinced Allen to meet with Swank and other Fort Worth pastors, with Patterson facilitating the meeting. The attempt at reconciliation failed. Swank started the meeting by demanding an apology from Allen, who responded, "Fred, I can't apologize for something I'm not sorry for."[70] With that stalemate, the meeting was mostly unproductive, and the two sides simply agreed to disagree on the issue of integration. Allen's continued push for integration was no doubt even more galling to his opponents because of his

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[67]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1972), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 119.
[68]Ibid.
[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid.

status as executive director of a major Texas Baptist organization like the TCLC.

The strong reaction against Allen's work on racial issues belied one of his most fundamental goals: to create change in a way that was moderate, incremental, and very much within the confines of Baptist theological conservatism. On the issue of race, he never adopted or advocated the techniques of direct action protest that characterized the work of other civil rights advocates of the time. His focus was on educating Baptists who might not be initially supportive but were at least open to the idea of a gradual move towards integration. When asked about his greatest accomplishment at the TCLC, Allen answered: "The whole process of education on Christian social concerns which included the conference method, coming into local churches to set up Christian life conferences, Christian Life weeks, furnishing . . . information to the pastor or program planner."[71] To Allen, these efforts represented his best chance of getting Texas Baptists on the right side of the civil rights issue. He believed the emphasis on education allowed his group to become "a catalyst for getting things done."[72] At times, Allen received criticism from those who wanted a more strident push towards full equality for African Americans and a more confrontational approach to achieving that goal. Without disagreeing with their methods, he simply defended his own. One of his favorite anecdotes was the reaction of the *Christian Century* editor who came to one of his conferences on race in the 1960s. The *Christian Century* embodied the liberal, direct-action wing of American Protestantism, and Allen expected complaints that the TCLC was too

[71]Allen, Jimmy Raymond. Oral Memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen. Interview by Daniel B. McGee. (Religion and Culture Project, 1973), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 153.
[72]Ibid., 154.

accommodating of Southern Baptist racism. But the editor instead "was very, very complimentary about the fact that Texas Baptists . . . probably had more energy moving at that level, at that point than any of the conferences he had been to anywhere and we were in the heart of where the problem was."[73] Allen was more than happy to defy conventional wisdom about "Southern Baptists with their nationwide reputation . . . for being so totally out of it."[74]

The resistance Allen received from some Baptists underscored the stark contrast between the TCLC's progressive approach to racial change and the conservative backlash that was sweeping cities like Fort Worth at the time. While Allen cannot reasonably be placed in the same category as the activists who were on the front lines of the civil rights movement, he certainly preferred a liberal course on racial issues; and he put his reputation on the line to push for integration. In doing so, he distinguished himself from the conservative evangelicals who organized the Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s. His actions on race help explain the reticence of many moderate Baptists to make common cause with that movement.

By 1968 Allen believed it was time for him to return to full-time pastoring, and he resigned from his position at the TCLC. But he did not leave until he was sure that his replacement would continue to push in the direction of racial equality and to keep Texas Baptists on record in favor of integration. His choice of successor was James Dunn, another Southwestern Seminary graduate who had been influenced by T. B. Maston's teachings on the social aspects of

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[73]Ibid.
[74]Ibid.

Christianity. Dunn was already an employee of the TCLC, and Allen was confident he would keep a strong emphasis on racial issues. Dunn himself never believed he would end up in that position and considered himself less than qualified because "I had not been a platform man" and "had not been the public speaker" on controversial issues in the past.[75] Despite his reservations, he would become one of the foremost Baptist spokespersons on racial issues, often defying a national leadership that was becoming more conservative and pushing Texas Baptists to stay active on racial issues.

Having witnessed some of the blowback Allen received for his advocacy on racial justice, Dunn had no illusions that his message would be uniformly well received. "I think all of us who are involved in Christian social concerns have to operate on hope, largely unrealized at the time," he insisted. "Because as we speak to injustice . . . we don't expect it to be applauded like a Mother's Day sermon or we don't expect it to be extremely popular . . . . We have to be careful not to go around feeling persecuted and get paranoid because we have to realize that we're doing a thing that by its very nature is not going to be exceedingly popular."[76] But he was determined to continue Allen's legacy, which he thought "was marked by strong leadership to get Southern Baptists in general, Texas Baptists in particular, to respond in a Christian fashion to the racial crisis that the nation was facing."[77] To Dunn, the race issue was "the major social problem of

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[75]Dunn, James M. Oral Memoirs of James M. Dunn. Interview by H. Wayne Pipkin. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 20.
[76]Ibid., 43.
[77]Ibid., 46.

the day."[78]

One important aspect of Dunn's handling of racial issues was his early insistence that the TCLC's internal employment practices match its emphasis on racial equality. Years earlier, Allen had finally gotten the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) to approve his motion abolishing separate bathrooms and dining facilities for African Americans in Texas Baptist buildings. But the point was a theoretical one, not a practical one: Until Dunn's tenure, no Texas Baptist agency employed an African American. Simple discrimination was certainly at the heart of the issue, but a major contributing factor to the lack of black employees was the rule that all employees be members of a Southern Baptist church. African American membership in SBC churches had been virtually non-existent, going all the way back to the years following the Civil War, when African Americans withdrew in large numbers.[79] Upon taking the helm of the TCLC in 1968, Dunn believed the hiring of an African American by the BGCT was long overdue. So he simply hired an African American woman to work in his administrative offices, hoping that it would not arouse too much controversy. As it turns out, the only controversy it caused was due to the fact that she was not a member of a Southern Baptist church. "We had to insist upon a little more flexibility of the legalism about there being a member of the Southern Baptist

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[78]Ibid.

[79]For more information on the founding of the Southern Baptist Church and its connection to pro-slavery politics, see Mark Noll, *The Civil War as Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); for more information on the lack of African American involvement in the Southern Baptist Church after its founding, see Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967) and Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1999).

church because at the time, this young woman was not."[80] Ultimately, the woman was able to persuade her church (which had a Baptist history) to join the Dallas Baptist Association, which included mostly Southern Baptist churches. To Dunn, that act served as evidence of the positive impact the TCLC's attempts at racial inclusion had. "We've tried to work very closely and believe that we have, as a kind of catalytic agent, with other denominational agencies" to promote racial justice.[81] In conjunction with his efforts to change the hiring practices of the BGCT, Dunn also persuaded Texas Baptist leaders to formally change the retirement procedures of state Baptist organizations, which had held separate policies for African Americans and whites, dating back many years. Not long after Dunn took control at the TCLC, that policy ended.[82]

Dunn was another advocate for racial justice who enjoyed strong support from the editorial board at the *Baptist Standard*. For example, a 1972 editorial lashed out at those who spread racial violence and hatred in the most unequivocal language: "These United States of ours will strike down these fugitives from hell---these hate mongers, these champions of violence and their kin---or the self-destruct button will destroy us sooner than we think."[83] Insisting that "No decade in our history is more scarred by the devil's disciples," the editorial noted that it included the assassination of one president, the murder of another presidential candidate, and "the murder of two Negro leaders in the civil

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[80]Dunn, James M. Oral Memoirs of James M. Dunn. Interview by Daniel B McGee. (Texas Baptist Oral History Project, 1974), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 56.
[81]Ibid., 57.
[82]Ibid., 56.
[83]"Editorials: We Destroy Ourselves," *Baptist Standard*, May 24, 1972, 6.

rights crusade."[84] Ultimately, the article called for peaceful solutions to conflict and spoke out against the "rule of the mob" that too often stood in the way of "the rights of the individual."[85] To be sure, *Standard* editors were careful not to offer the kind of overflowing embrace of the civil rights movement that religious liberals did, but it is nonetheless significant that Texas Baptist leaders spoke out on the issue at all.

The *Standard* also frequently used its pages to advertise, analyze, and support the conferences on race relations that Dunn and denominational liberals continued to hold. For example, a 1973 article praised the work of the national Christian Life Commission for holding a special conference called "Race: New Directions for a New Day." Printed without an attributed author, the article was clearly the work of the *Standard*'s editorial staff, and it could scarcely have been more forthright in its support for racial liberalism. The article began by noting that, "Apathy, inactivity and regression, mingled with some signs of hope, characterize race relations in America today . . . "[86] It went on to quote Larry McSwain, a well-known Southern Baptist advocate for racial equality: "Much of the apathy and inactivity in racial affairs is the result of the widespread belief by white America that since the riots have stopped, the problems are solved."[87] He went on: "America is more segregated than it was five years ago. There is more residential segregation and more school segregation than five years ago."[88] A Southern Baptist professor, Thomas Bland, went even further, stating that Baptists should

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[84]Ibid.
[85]Ibid.
[86]"Christian Life Conference: Race Relations Apathy Hit," *Baptist Standard*, June 27, 1973, 12.
[87]Ibid.
[88]Ibid.

see "what is happening in race relations today as an expression of God's judgment upon us" and that "the consequences of sin are shared across generations."[89]

The article did not simply embrace the conference's examination of lingering racial problems, but also its liberal solutions. T. B. Maston, the Southwestern Seminary professor who mentored Valentine and Allen, delivered a speech in 1973 titled, "Where We Are in Race Relations." In the speech, delivered at a Christian Life conference in Atlanta, he embraced the need for school busing as a way to achieve racial equity in public education, breaking sharply with other southern evangelicals who viewed busing as a form of government intrusion.[90] Calling busing opposition a "phony issue," Maston noted that transporting children to schools had long been a practice in American public education. He also called the fear that busing would lower academic standards "part of the problem" and insisted that, "White people will have to pay for a while for the inferior education that Negro youngsters received for years in segregated schools."[91] Seminary professor Bland echoed Maston's comments, saying that Southern Baptists should not let what some "may feel to be a loss of educational quality" deter them from the traditional Baptist support for public schools. He admonished Southern Baptists to "stand by our schools" and insisted, "We should resist all efforts to have our church buildings become private, segregated

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[89]Ibid.
[90]For more on the southern evangelical response to school busing, see Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); For more on anti-busing politics in the South during the 1970s, see Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).
[91]"Christian Life Conference: Race Relations Apathy Hit," *Baptist Standard*, June 27, 1973, 12.

'Christian schools.'"[92] Again, his comments were in stark contrast to the growing movement of religious conservatives who saw private religious academies as a way to undermine public schools, which they were convinced served as tools of secularization.[93] By aligning themselves with the liberal-leaning Christian Life Commission, Texas Baptists leaders were implicitly rejecting the anti-public school stance adopted by many leaders of the Christian Right in the 1970s. Besides their support for public schools, conference leaders also argued that Southern Baptists should be proactive in pushing for integration of their churches. "The local church has the challenge before us to make visible in the human community the love of God for all people," Bland said. "This surely means a racially inclusive membership."[94] Calling the church "the most segregated institution in American society," he argued that "as the numerically dominant denomination in those regions with the greatest involvement in race relations," the SBC "should be exceedingly careful to fulfill our Christian service as citizens."[95] Undeniably, the Christian Life Commission represented the left wing of Southern Baptist politics on racial (and most other) issues. But it is significant that the largest state Baptist association in the country associated itself openly with the Commission's liberal racial politics.

The *Standard* also gave positive coverage to Baptist efforts to dispel common myths about race and sex. A 1973 conference sought to undermine the notion that "the breakdown of the family" was in any way due to African American

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[92]Ibid.
[93]For more on the Christian Right's advocacy for private schools, see Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
[94]Ibid.
[95]Ibid.

civil rights.[96] The main point of the conference was to achieve "freedom from all racial and sexual mythologies."[97] Two pastors (one African American and one white) took aim at what they considered popular misconceptions about these subjects. Specifically, they tried "to explode the myths that all blacks are immoral, that all black people want to marry white people, that black men are exceptionally virile and that blacks are totally uninhibited about sex."[98] The very discussion of such topics might seem bizarre to contemporary readers, but in the early 1970s, such ideas were far too common in white southern circles.[99] That Texas Baptists would go on record against these myths showed a progressive inclination on issues of race and gender that was quite rare among white evangelicals in the South.

Talking about these issues openly was controversial, but Harry Hollis, an organizer with the Christian Life Commission, presented the need for doing so. "Talk about sex can lead to everything from angry pickets to empty pulpits," he said. "Talk about race has split churches and broken families, so when we talk about race and sex together, it is not surprising that the result can be dynamite. Yet talk we must because it is often claimed . . . that sex is the hidden agenda between races in this country."[100] Hollis invited an African American minister from Houston, William Lawson, to give a black perspective on these issues. Lawson was unequivocal in labeling the common myths about race and sex "racist to the

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[96]"Christian Life Commission: Racial Sex Myths Smashed at Seminar," *Baptist Standard*, March 28, 1973, 5.
[97]Ibid.
[98]Ibid.
[99]On this point, see Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred After *Brown*," *Journal of Southern History* 91 (2004): 119-144.
[100]"Christian Life Commission: Racial Sex Myths Smashed at Seminar," *Baptist Standard*, March 28, 1973, 5.

core" and "another way of trying to keep blacks in their place."[101] For his part, Hollis not only agreed with Lawson's assessment and pushed for racial reconciliation, but he also embraced a liberal stance on women's issues. "At this time of women's liberation movements . . . I want to say that I celebrate the advent of woman's liberation, and man's liberation, but only if they point to that much desired goal of human liberation."[102] The support of the *Standard* for this conference and its goals was another indication that Texas Baptists represented a very different point of view on racial issues than most of their white evangelical counterparts in the South. Historian Paul Harvey has argued that to defend "the southern way of life" in the 1970s, white evangelicals shifted from overt racism to a strict defense of gender norms.[103] For Texas Baptists, though, the opposite seems to have been true: Their leadership embraced progressive changes in race relations and gender expectations, albeit in a moderate and gradual way.

Leaders at the *Standard* and the TCLC never convinced all of their fellow Baptists to embrace the social aspects of the gospel or to push for racial justice in their communities. But they did give Texas Baptists a reputation for being much more progressive on racial issues than any other group of state Baptists in the country. A. C. Miller, the Southwestern Seminary professor who mentored Valentine, Allen, and Dunn, and helped found the TCLC, ultimately viewed their work as a success. He conceded that "There are too many of our churches that

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[101]Ibid.
[102]Ibid.
[103]Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 197.

don't even yet believe in talking about social matters."[104] He also worried that some churches were too willing to emphasize evangelism to the exclusion of advocating for social change: "If you want to talk about a social matter, they want to talk about revivalism. They are still warning us that we mustn't be too concerned about man's physical needs."[105] But even with the continuing struggles, he firmly believed "progress is being made" and lauded his successors in both the Southern Baptist and Texas Baptist commissions as being "instrumental in causing a change in Southern Baptist thinking regarding social problems."[106] Specifically, he was convinced that the Christian Life Commission was firmly entrenched in Texas and that it could continue its work of advocating for racial justice and other controversial issues. "I think the Christian Life Commission is set in our convention for such a time as this," he insisted.[107]

Not all Texas Baptists would have agreed with him on that subject, but it is clear that the leadership of the state convention was very much in sync with the goals of the TCLC in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. From repeated attempts to racially integrate churches to numerous seminars designed to promote racial justice to the consistent editorial support of the *Baptist Standard*, Texas Baptist leaders charted a path of moderation and racial reconciliation that diverged significantly from that of many other white evangelicals. Historians like Harvey, Dan Carter, and Joseph Crespino have noted the connection between the white backlash against civil rights and the rise of evangelical conservatives as a

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[104]Don McGregor, "A.C. Miller: Pioneer Worker Backs CLC," *Baptist Standard*, May 12, 1971, 12.
[105]Ibid.
[106]Ibid.
[107]Ibid.

national political force. In short, the politics of cultural anxieties resonated in the 1960s and 1970s, not just with white southerners, but with a broad range of Christian activists who rose to prominence in the Republican Party and eventually helped elect Ronald Reagan president. But the story of Texas Baptists during these same years should complicate our understanding of white southern politics and remind us that not all evangelicals shared the rightward bent of Christian conservatives on issues of race. It should also help us understand why the largest Baptist convention in the country ultimately rejected the embrace of Republican politics that characterized many other Baptists during these years.

Conclusion

Charting a Different Course

By the late 1980s moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had mostly lost hope of regaining control of the convention from fundamentalists. They had lost every convention battle since the fundamentalist victory in 1979, and it was apparent that the denomination would not move away from its conservative course. In December 1987 Daniel Vestal, a leading voice for Baptist moderates, appeared on a PBS documentary, "God and Country," hosted by Bill Moyers. He detailed for viewers how fundamentalists had seized control of the SBC and lamented Baptist moderates' loss of influence in denominational and national politics. His comments caused quite a stir. "I received hundreds of responses by phone, mail, and personal visit," he remembered. "Everywhere I turned, people were saying to me, 'Something has to be done.'"[1] Reacting to these queries, he urged concerned Baptists to join Baptists Committed, an organization that moderates formed to fight fundamentalist influence in the denomination. Working with this organization, Vestal ran for president of the SBC at the annual convention in New Orleans in 1990. He and other moderate leaders viewed it as a last ditch effort to save the convention, but fundamentalists soundly defeated his bid. In response, moderate Baptists met in Atlanta later that

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[1]Daniel Vestal, "The History of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship" in Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderates Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 253.

year to discuss the possibility of breaking away from the national convention, which had moved so far to the right on many issues that it no longer felt like home. Jimmy Allen, who had worked so tirelessly on issues like church-state separation, poverty, and racial justice, was one of the leaders of the new group. Moderates eventually voted to found the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a rival organization to the SBC that was committed to traditional Baptist principles like the separation of church and state, the autonomy of individual churches, and "soul liberty" for each believer.[2]

Although moderates in the national convention ultimately broke away from the SBC due to fundamentalist influence, in Texas, it was the fundamentalists who broke off to form a rival faction. Moderates had always controlled the state convention in Texas, but after 1990 they grew increasingly worried that the same fundamentalists who gained power in the SBC would do so in the BGCT. To prevent that, they formed Texas Baptists Committed, a statewide branch of Baptists Committed, to promote the moderate cause and oppose the fundamentalists. They were quite successful in their efforts. Texas Baptist moderates began running slates of candidates and winning elections at state conventions. They were so good at turning out the moderate vote that they convinced fundamentalist Baptists in the state that they would need to form a new faction. Southern Baptists of Texas, a group of fundamentalist Baptists in the state, formed in 1995 and split completely with the Baptist General

[2]Ibid., 254-257.

Convention of Texas (BGCT) in 1998.[3] By that time, Texas Baptist moderates had lost the battle for control of the national convention, but defeated their fundamentalist opponents at the state level.[4]

The defeat of fundamentalist Baptists in Texas was another demonstration of the moderation present in the country's largest state association of evangelical Christians. When presented with an agenda of right-wing political agitation, attacks on the separation of church and state, and the enforcement of theological purity in the SBC, Texas Baptists rejected it. Not only was such an agenda inconsistent with their traditional support for church/state separation, but the attacks leveled against Texas Baptist institutions like Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary rankled many Baptists in the state. Ultimately, these differences led to an irrevocable split between the fundamentalist Baptist movement and the largest group of Baptists in the country.

There is little doubt that Texas was unique in some ways. The presence of Baylor and Southwestern certainly gave moderates an edge, as hundreds of pastors in the state were trained at those bastions of the moderate cause. The *Baptist Standard* was a unique weapon that moderates did not hesitate to use in the battle to win over the loyalties of rank-and-file Baptists. And the Texas Christian Life Commission allowed moderates in the state to organize more effectively against fundamentalists and to more quickly oppose the conservative political agenda they began pushing in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, of course, Baptist moderates in Texas were fortunate to have leaders like E. S. James,

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[3]Rick McClatchy, "The Texas Two-Step," in Carl L. Kell, ed., *Exiled: Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 81-83.
[4]Ibid.

Jimmy Allen, Foy Valentine, and James Dunn, who were willing to expend political and social capital to prevent their state convention from effectively becoming an arm of the Republican National Convention.

But it would be a mistake for historians to assume that Texas Baptists were so unique that their story holds little relevance for a broader examination of southern politics after 1960. Not only was Texas the largest state group of Baptists in the country, but leaders of the BGCT were important players in the national denomination throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and even into the 1980s. Before the Christian Right began to organize as a movement, the moderation that characterized Texas Baptists was also present in the leadership of the SBC. When fundamentalists took control of the national convention, they did so narrowly. For example, at the 1979 annual convention, the fundamentalist choice for president of the SBC, Adrien Rogers, won with only 51 percent of the vote.[5] The fact that moderates eventually lost control of the convention should not blind us to their status as important players in the religious and political changes that reshaped the South after 1960. Southern Baptist moderates were a powerful force that controlled the country's largest Protestant denomination until at least 1979 (and, in practice, until their defeat at the 1985 convention).[6]

As the experience of Texas Baptists demonstrates, these moderates articulated their own unique version of Baptist ideology, one which is rarely accounted for in the existing scholarship on the rise of the Christian Right. They

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[5]Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 6.
[6]See Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 3-18.

were rigidly defensive about issues of church and state. Whether opposing organized prayer in public schools, defending a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy, or organizing against public funding of private schools, they were consistent in their belief that government should stay as far away from private religion as possible. On issues of gender, they were surprisingly open to the idea of women in ministry and committed to opposing a political agenda centered on abortion. Theologically, they were adamant in defending the right of each Baptist to make up her or his own mind about religious issues and reluctant to enforce theological purity within their denomination. They were avid supporters of a robust social safety net, even going so far as to organize political campaigns in defense of welfare and in support of poverty relief programs. On racial issues, they were decidedly moderate, hosting campaigns to facilitate integration in public schools and insisting that Baptist churches extend a welcoming hand to people of color.

To be sure, Texas Baptists never flirted with theological liberalism. Not only did they consistently hold to the Bible as the rule of faith, but they always maintained that the most important role for any Christian was to spread the "good news" of salvation to lost souls. In other words, they were committed evangelicals in the historic sense.[7] But despite their pronounced theological conservatism, they emphatically rejected an alliance with the Christian Right as it emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. For historians who have assumed a monolithic response among southern evangelicals to the coming of the Christian Right, the

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[7]For more on definitions of evangelicals, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

experience of Texas Baptists should cause a reexamination. Too often, the scholarship on southern politics after 1960 has assumed that the religious conservatism of evangelicals made the region a very natural fit for Christian Right organizing and Republican political dominance. But the country's largest state group of evangelicals found the political changes that swept the South quite troubling. Their story indicates that the alliance between evangelicals and the Christian Right was neither inevitable nor unavoidable. In fact, given the long Baptist tradition of supporting the separation of church and state, it was somewhat surprising that the denomination eventually came under the control of Christian Right activists.

As historians consider how religion contributed to the reshaping of southern politics after 1960, they would be wise to probe further the experiences of conservative evangelicals who did not find a welcoming home in the Christian Right or the Republican Party. They should also insist on an examination of southern religion that is as complicated as the South itself, resisting the temptation to assume uniformity among southern evangelicals. Texas may be a surprising location for strong resistance to the Christian Right, but Baptists there nevertheless offered a critique of conservative religious politics that was as thoughtful and deeply felt as anything the political left could muster. For those seeking to understand the profound political and religious changes that transformed the South after 1960, the story of Texas Baptists should be instructive. It should prompt a rethinking of common assumptions, a retelling of the Christian Right's history, and a renewed interest in the role moderate Baptists

played in creating the modern South.

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